

II THESSALONIANS 3:1-2
PRAY FOR US . . .

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to II Thessalonians chapter 3 as we continue our study through Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica.

This letter may not be very long, but it is packed with lessons for us to learn and apply to our lives.

We saw that in II Thessalonians chapter 1 that Paul gave them *ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING!* And we may not like suffering, we may not like persecution for our faith, but it was, and it is a reality in the lives of Christians. There was growth in their faith through this.

And yes, it is easy to throw in the towel and give up. It is hard to keep on fighting, but Paul wants them to forge ahead in this battle because the Lord will see them through and we will be taken to glory!

And as we saw, having a correct perspective of the situation helps us to continue on in this battle. It is when we lose that perspective that we also lose hope and we just fade away, drop out, isolate ourselves!

But Paul reminds them what is in store for the wicked and for the righteous, for them. He tells us in II Thessalonians 1:9-10, **“These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”**

I think we all need to hear that and especially in times of trouble, of persecution. Thus, Paul gives to them and to us *ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING!*

As we moved into II Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul now gives to them

ENLIGHTENMENT ABOUT THE DAY OF THE LORD!

It seems that they were shaken and troubled by people saying that they were in the Day of the Lord, supposedly speaking for the Lord and this false doctrine shook their world! There was also a forged letter from Paul that said that they missed the Rapture and that they were in the Day of the Lord!

And Paul basically says, “Forget about it!” He tells them not to be deceived by these things because they are not true. They are false doctrines that have come into the church by false teachers and look at what it has caused, confusion, trouble!

And then he tells them that the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation Period will not start until **“the falling away comes first”** or the departure of the church. In other words, the Day of the Lord will not begin until the church is Raptured!

Which fits in with what Paul is saying in this chapter. They thought they missed the Rapture and were in the Day of the Lord and Paul is showing them that it is impossible for that to happen. The Rapture comes first and then the Day of the Lord!

And after the Rapture occurs then the man of sin, the son of perdition is revealed! First the removal of the church, the Rapture; and then the revealing of the Antichrist!

And Paul goes into great detail describing what this man of sin will be like and how he will want to be worshiped as God, even going into the Temple of God and demanding this!

And we saw how the people of this world will buy into **“the lie”** or the idea that they are gods. This is a specific lie and it comes right out of the lies that Satan spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden, **“you will be like God.”**

And just so they will not lose perspective of the situation here, Paul tells them, “**And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.**” II Thessalonians 2:8. This man of sin will be taken care of by the Lord, it is not a battle, he is gone!

So, Paul clears up their confusion so that they are not shaken in mind or troubled by the lies they were told. They heard the Word of God and it brought comfort to their lives as they saw that they did not miss anything!

And that is important for us as well. We need to understand the days we are living in and what is ahead so that we will not be shaken in mind or troubled by the things we hear and see. Thus, these are words of ***ENLIGHTENMENT ABOUT THE DAY OF THE LORD!***

And now, as we begin our study in II Thessalonians chapter 3, the focus of this chapter is the ***ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIAN LIVING!***

This is the pattern for many of Paul’s letters, he speaks forth doctrine in several chapters and then he speaks of walking accordingly. In other words, living out our faith or applying these things to our lives.

Many people can quote all kinds of Bible verses, they may even know Hebrew and Greek, but when it comes to living out their faith, you don’t see it. Information is important, and correct information is important, but if you don’t apply that information to your life then it really is meaningless to you!

We saw this played out in our study of Romans as Paul spent 11 chapters on doctrine and then, beginning in Romans chapter 12, he tells us that we need to walk accordingly. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul said, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”**

And Paul speaks of how we are to live in society, how we are to live in obedience to the government, how we are to treat our neighbors, how we are to use our Christian freedom we have, and-so-on.

This is truly where the rubber meets the road, living out your faith so people can see your faith is real.

Paul also used this pattern in his letter to the Ephesians. He spends 3 chapters dealing with doctrine and then in the next 3 chapters Paul deals with our Christian walk. He tells us in Ephesians 4:1, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”**

In other words, you have been called by God and now walk accordingly! You are His representative and people don't care how much Bible knowledge you know, but they will observe how you live out your faith, what you say and what you do!

And Paul hits some heavy topics, like unity. The gifted men and the gifts that God has given to us. Putting off the old life and putting on Christ, the new man. Not grieving the Holy Spirit with bitterness, wrath, anger, loud quarreling, evil speaking. Walking in love and in the light of Christ and not in darkness. Being filled with the Holy Spirit. Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives submitting to their own husbands and husbands treating their wives as the Lord loves the church and gave His life for it. Children obeying their parents. Slaves obeying their masters and masters treating their slaves kindly. And putting on the whole armor of God because this battle is intense, and you do not want to go into battle naked!

And there are a few more we can go through, but I think you get the idea because that is what we will see here in II Thessalonians chapter 3, this ***ESTABLISHMENT FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING!***

I have called this study, ***“Pray for Us!”*** I don’t think we realize the importance of prayer in our own lives and in the lives of others as we pray for them. And, as we will see in these verses we will be looking at this morning, Paul makes 3 points in regard to prayer or what to be praying for. They are,

PRAYER FOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL – II THESSALONIANS 3:1a

PRAYER FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL – II THESSALONIANS 3:1b

PRAYER FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE GOSPEL – II THESSALONIANS 3:2

So that will be our focus this morning as we look at this ***ESTABLISHMENT FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING!***

With that as our background, let’s begin reading in II Thessalonians chapter 3, beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

II THESSALONIANS 3

VERSES 1-2

First of all, before we deal with these prayer requests from Paul, the focus of this is the Gospel message. I find it interesting that the Gospel message has changed today, and that should not happen!

Let me show you what I mean. One writer put it like this. He wrote,

My oldest son, Luke, sent me a link the other day that quoted A. W. Tozer and James Kennedy (both wonderful Christian leaders in their day). Both men believed that many, if not most, professing believers they encountered around the country were not actually saved. They were deeply troubled by the distortions of the gospel that were the result of trying to get the gospel to more people. Well intentioned yes, but eternally dangerous for the souls of men and woman who had not heard the whole message. The article prompted me to look back in my file for something I remembered writing a while back. Here it is . . . What gospel have you heard and believed?

Five Distortions of the Gospel in Our Day

1) The Cake Mix Gospel: if we leave out key ingredients our souls will never “rise” to God. We don’t need the message reduced to some irreducible elements, we need the whole gospel. You don’t expect your car to run without all the parts. You don’t expect your body to function without all the organs working properly. You don’t expect a cake to taste right if it’s rushed and readied without the right ingredients. The gospel without repentance is not the gospel. Acts 18:26, “And he [Apollos] began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”

2) The Cultural Gospel: Skip the postmodern sales job and go for the heart where human need never changes. Understanding the ‘culture’ is much less important than knowing what the Bible says about every human heart separated from God. We don’t need slick sales people giving out the gospel. We need bold, Spirit-filled messengers with a deep heart of compassion for lost people. The gospel without authoritative/binding truth is not the gospel. Acts 17:30, “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

3) The Cool Gospel: Jesus transcends fashion trends. Marketing Jesus is cheap and powerless. We don't need to 'spin' the message we need to say it. We need to stop shaping Jesus in some misguided effort to make Him appealing. Jesus doesn't need to be like us; we need to be like Him. The gospel wrapped in stylistic packaging is not the gospel. Revelation 3:17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

4) The Carnal Gospel: What Jesus can do for me: health, wealth, always happy, never hurting? Jesus solves those issues, but not the way we may think. He'll change what you want a lot more than what you have. The selfish gospel that promises things Jesus doesn't promise is a lie and is sentencing the lost who listen to a shocking surprise in eternity. The gospel of "me before Jesus" is not the gospel. Mark 8:35 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

5) The Careful Gospel: Let's not upset anybody, just keep 'em comfortable and coming back, there's lots of time for folks to figure it out. The gospel of "get them to church, and in time everything will come together as long as we don't offend them" is a dangerous gospel. Well intentioned is not enough. The gospel without urgency is not the gospel. 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION."

Do you understand the implications of a distorted gospel? What horror to imagine many people thinking they are ready to meet God only to find out they never were because they believed a distorted gospel. Matthew 7 predicts just a scene of shocking surprise. Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock."

- <https://blog.jamesmacdonald.com/five-distortions-of-the-gospel-in-our-day/>

And within this mix of false Gospel's that are being presented we see the rejection of the blood atonement, the rejection that Jesus is God, the rejection that Jesus was without sin, the rejection that Jesus is the only way. And this list goes on because once you start ignoring or downplaying the Word of God, there is no stopping what you will reject!

So, what is this Gospel message? We do need to understand this because if we get this wrong then what are we giving to people? We are giving them an empty message that will not save them!

This Gospel message, this Good News Paul expounds on I Corinthians 15:1-4, what the Gospel message is all about. He tells us, **“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”**

First of all, let me give to you the bad news. Sin has separated man from God. And there is nothing that man could do to rectify that problem. Yes, in the Old Testament we see animal sacrifices being offered day in and day out, year after year and they could never take away a person's sin, only cover it for a time, until you sinned again.

These sacrifices were a type, or a picture of what Jesus would do as He became sin for us and paid in full the penalty for our sins, all of our sins.

It is as we are told in Hebrews 10:3-4, **“But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”**

So, that is the bad news. We are dead in our trespasses and sins and there is nothing we can do to rectify that problem, as I have said.

And listen to what we are told in Hebrews 10:8-18, because it is the Good News of the Gospel. We are told, **“Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”**

What man could not do God has done! God became flesh, He dwelt among us so that He could go to the cross of Calvary and die for our sins. He is the Lamb of God who has come to **TAKE AWAY** the sins of the world, not cover them.

The Law has been taken away and replaced with God extending Grace to us through Jesus Christ. The Law could never ever take away a person’s sins. All the Law could do is show you how far short you come to God’s standard of perfection.

And if anyone thinks that they are keeping the Law, you are like the Pharisees in your pride. If you could keep the Law, Jesus would not have come and thus, salvation could come through our efforts, but they can't.

And James tells us that if you are keeping the Law and yet stumble in one point of the Law, you are guilty of transgressing all of the Law. I think that is clear and who wants to be associated with breaking the whole Law, not me!

And it is not only the death of Jesus but His resurrection from the dead as Paul tells us in Romans 4:25 regarding Jesus, **“who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”**

Here is the Good News folks, the glorious truth, that God justifies the ungodly, you and me! Anders Nygren put it this way, “When we believe in Jesus as ‘put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification,’ we believe in the God ‘who gives life to the dead.’”

G. Campbell Morgan was once approached by a soldier who said he would give anything to believe that God would forgive sins, “but I cannot believe He will forgive me if I just turn to Him. It is too cheap.” Dr. Morgan said to him: “You were working in the mine today. How did you get out of the pit?”

He answered, “The way I usually do; I got into the cage and was pulled to the top.” “How much did you pay to come out of the pit?” “I didn't pay anything.” “Weren't you afraid to trust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?” The man replied, “Oh, no! It was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink that shaft.” The man saw the light, that it was the infinite price paid by the Son of God for our salvation, which comes to us by faith and not by anything that we can do.

- James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited, Looking For The Light

Absolutely! You see, it all boils down to this. Our offenses were the problem that needed to be dealt with. It was our sin that had separated us from God. God wanted a relationship with us, but a holy and righteous God could not look down with favor upon sinful man and thus, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ to pay in full the penalty for our sins. Thus, our justification is the result of what Christ has done and it is no longer our righteousness that God looks down upon, which are like filthy rags, but the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed into our lives by faith. It is the result of what God has done, that He has raised us by Christ's resurrection.

That is the Gospel folks! Now, to reject the gospel is to embrace the bad news. Condemnation before God is the result of a lack of faith in the Son of God, God's only provision for salvation. But the Good News, the Gospel is that God has given a doomed world good news. Why would anyone reject the gospel?

So, that is the Gospel message and in regard to the Gospel, Paul declared in Romans 1:16-17, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”**

And Paul's desire was to see people saved, to see them believe and receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and this is done by, as Paul tells us in Romans 10:17, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

Thus, what Paul brought to the Thessalonian people was the Gospel Message, the Word of God, and as they received and believed the Word of God they then believed and received Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Now Paul wants them to pray for him so that he can bring the Gospel message, the Word of God to others!

Paul's first point is simple, *PRAYER FOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL*. Paul put it like this in the first part of II Thessalonians 3:1a, **“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course . . .”**

Picture in your mind what Paul is praying for here. He wants these believers to pray that the Word of God would, have a **“free course”** or **“run swiftly”** or TRECHO, (trekh'-o) in the Greek. It literally means “to speed on” or “to make progress.”

Think of it like a runner who is moving forward, passing obstacles, gaining new ground. That was Paul's desire, to move the Gospel message forward and not for it to become stagnant.

And I can tell you from personal experience. When you are in a race and you begin to pass people, it encourages you to go on, to forge ahead and try to get to the next person and the next person.

When you share your faith with someone that is how it should work. It should encourage us to continue on. What if you are rejected or mocked or whatever?

In a race you will have success and sometimes you will not, but it should not stop you from going forward. We are to move forward with the Gospel message and spread the Good News to a world that has so much bad news!

Several years ago, when Julie and I were in Hawaii, in Waikiki, we were walking around town, next to the beach area, and there was this man standing on the corner. Nothing too strange with that so far, and pretty normal for vacationers to do so far.

Here is where it got weird. As we got closer to this intersection, closer to this man I heard him yelling about Jesus!

Now yelling is not a good witnessing tool. Also, he was not looking at anyone in particular. In fact, he wasn't looking at anyone, just facing the road and yelling about Jesus to no one!

I don't know about you but for me, I don't think that is what Paul was speaking of when he asked for prayer to move the Gospel message forward, to spread it. There is no love, no compassion, no care for anyone, just yelling about Jesus!

Paul had a heart to get the Gospel out to people and we see a similar request in Ephesians 6:19 where he wrote, "**and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.**"

We see this again in Colossians 4:2-4, where Paul tells us, "**Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.**"

Here's the thing. If you don't reach out and touch people, come in contact with their lives, get close to them, show them that you care, why are you doing it? We are to love them with the love of God and not yell at them.

And I know, it is not easy. But if it was easy then everyone would do it and we really would not need the Lord. But we do need the Lord, and thus, we pray for the Gospel message to spread through our family, through our friends, through our co-workers, through people we come in contact with!

And sometimes God will bring you before people who are ready to eat you alive. Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

A missionary was once asked to give a proof that the cross would eventually triumph. This is what he replied.

“When I arrived at my mission station, the Fiji Islands, this is what I had to do first of all: bury the hands, arms, feet, and heads of eighty victims whose bodies had been roasted and eaten at a cannibal feast. I lived to see those very cannibals who had taken part in that inhuman feast gathered at the Lord’s table.”

Such a miracle could be performed by no one but Jesus Christ. The products of civilization – schools, factories, saloons, pornography – would have given them disease and death, as they did to most of our Indians. Jesus came, and those that used to eat each other henceforth loved each other. Well, the same cause always has the same effects: always the Gospel changes hearts.

- Practical Bible Illustrations from Yesterday and Today

You see, Jesus told us to go and be fishers of men. He never told us to clean the fish, that is what the Holy Spirit through God’s Word does!

Thus, if we will just go fishing and use the Word of God as bait, in a sense, we will catch fish!

The Lord promised us in Isaiah 55:11, **“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”**

Do we believe that? If we do, we would run swiftly with the Word of God and bring it to people because it has the power to change their lives by the Spirit of God!

And it is possible that Paul was thinking of Psalm 147:15 when he wrote of the Gospel sprinting from place to place in spite of the obstacles that are placed to hinder it. The Psalmist wrote, “**He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly.**” The Amplified Bible puts it like this, “**He sends forth His commandment to the earth; His word runs very swiftly.**” The Living Bible has it like this, “**He sends his orders to the world. How swiftly his word flies.**”

You see, if you doubt God’s Word being living and powerful, able to transform lives, what are you going to give to people?

I like the way the Warren Wiersbe sums this up for us. He wrote, “Too much Christian work these days is accomplished by human plans and promotion, and not by the Word of God. We trust our programs and not the Word of God. The universe was created, and is sustained, by the Word of God (Heb. 11:3). Surely His Word can accomplish His work in this world. But the preaching of the Word in the pulpit has too often been replaced by the entertainment of the world on the platform. Dr. Donald Coggan has said of Christian pastors: ‘It is their task to feed the sheep - not to entertain the goats.’”

Exactly. And if you are in the business of entertaining the goats or the unsaved, you are starving the sheep. The goats need to hear the Word of God and as they do the goats can become sheep, they can be saved!

I realize, in the days we are living in we think bigger is better. More lights, more sound, more this and more that and in the end, who are we trusting in, the efforts of man or Almighty God, the creator of Heaven and earth?

Let me share this story with you because it will show you the power of God's Word upon someone we might feel that it will not work on, we need something else. But we don't! We are told,

A Christian university student shared a room with a Muslim. As they became friends, their conversation turned to their beliefs. The believer asked the Muslim if he'd ever read the Bible. He answered no, but then asked if the Christian had ever read the Koran.

The believer responded, "No, I haven't, but I'm sure it would be interesting. Why don't we read both together, once a week, alternating books?" The young man accepted the challenge, their friendship deepened, and during the second term he became a believer in Jesus.

One evening, late in the term, he burst into the room and shouted at the longtime believer, "You deceived me!"

"What are you talking about?" the believer asked.

The new believer opened his Bible and said, "I've been reading it through, like you told me, and just read that the Word is living and active!"

He grinned. "You knew all along that the Bible contained God's power and that the Koran is a book like any other. I never had a chance!"

"And now you'll hate me for life?" queried the believer.

"No," he answered, "but it was an unfair contest."

- Floyd Schneider, *Evangelism for the Fainthearted*

At times Christians are almost embarrassed to speak forth the Word of God, they are afraid to speak it because of what others might say of them. Are you willing to allow someone to go to Hell because you are embarrassed to speak forth the Word of God?

You see, when we look at it with that perspective it seems so obvious what we are to do – share our faith, bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people, speak forth the Word of God!

Remember what Peter said in I Peter 1:22-25, **“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because ‘All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”**

Paul understood that the prayers of the saints would assist him in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. That those roadblocks or obstacles that the enemy may put up, will not stand! The Gospel message will move forward.

Thus, may we pray for the moving of the Gospel in our own lives, in the lives of other believers here in the church, and those who don’t come here and are spreading the Gospel message!

So, this first point is, ***PRAYER FOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL!***

The second point that Paul makes in these verses we have been looking at this morning is found in the last part of II Thessalonians 3:1b, where Paul tells us, **“... that the word of the Lord may . . . be glorified, just as it is with you.”**

In other words, ***PRAYER FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL!***

We have seen that Paul's prayer request from these Thessalonian believers was not only that the Word of God would "run swiftly" but that it would also "be glorified" or ***PRAYER FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.***

The idea here is that the Word of God would be received with the proper respect. The problem we are seeing today is that many in the church don't even respect God's Word.

The Word of God is treated like some kind of spiritual smorgasbord where people pick and choose what they want to partake of, what they like and what they don't like.

If it doesn't fit their lifestyle, they reject it. If it does, then they will receive it. There are others who don't believe the Bible is the Word of God but the words of man.

That is very dangerous, and it does not bring glory to God or His Word.

I found this interesting. The Russian Dictionary defines the Bible as a "collection of fantastic legends without scientific support. It is full of dark hints, historical mistakes, and contradictions. It serves as a factor for gaining power and subjugating unknowing nations."

What is interesting to me is that the Russian government will not tolerate the Christian faith and has spoken openly about it, and the people are forced to feel this way by the government.

Now, what we see here in America is that we are not forced to believe a certain way, but we have the freedom and yet, we have taken that freedom and used it to sin instead of repenting and drawing close to God!

People read of the judgment of God, of the chastening of God, and they laugh, mock what the Word of God says. And it reminds me of the days of Noah, not that I am that old, but that for all those years that Noah was building the Ark people were mocking him, making fun of him until that first raindrop fell!

And we do not have the freedom to pick and choose what we want from the Bible. Paul makes this powerful point in II Timothy 3:16-17, where he tells us, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

Notice that the words come from the mouth of God who inspired men to write them! From Genesis through the book of Revelation God’s Word is God’s Word!

And for those who still doubt the Word of God as being accurate, listen to what archaeological evidence shows us. You see folks; we don’t have to be ashamed of the Word of God, the Bible. We are told,

Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, former professor of Semitic philology [study of Semitic language] at Princeton Theological Seminary, said, “After forty-five years of scholarly research in biblical textual studies and in language study, I have come now to the conviction that no man knows enough to assail the truthfulness of the Old Testament. Where there is sufficient documentary evidence to make an investigation, the statements of the Bible, in the original text, have stood the test.”

And the noted Dr. J. O. Kinnaman said, “Of the hundreds of thousands of artifacts found by the archaeologists, not one has ever been discovered that contradicts or denies one word, phrase, clause, or sentence of the Bible, but always confirms and verifies the facts of the Biblical record.”

And yet, there are those who claim to be Christian and deny the Bible and yet, say they follow the Lord. But how do you follow the Lord when you don't know what to believe and not believe about Him if the Bible is not the Word of God? You don't and that is a problem and it leads to all kinds of unbiblical doctrine!

Here is what one person wrote and note who he is affiliated with and what he does. We are told in regard to why the Bible is not the Word of God,

Perhaps it should be first noted that *I am a licensed minister in the Missionary Baptist tradition*. I believe in preaching the word of God. I believe in the saving of souls from the clutches of dark forces. I believe that God is all-loving and all-powerful, and that his son, Jesus of Nazareth, was the son of God, who has given us a way to live life fully and abundantly. Yet, I do not believe the Holy Bible is the infallible word of God.

The Holy Bible is a collection of Christian texts that is the result of refinement by men who thought they were led by God to discern his teachings. The early Christian world was diverse and everyone had a different take on the Gospel of Jesus. These disagreements were "settled" in large meetings of high ranking priests called "Councils." The Council of Hippo (one of the African Synods) drew up a collection of texts, which is now the Catholic Bible (including a class of texts I as a Protestant would call Apocrypha), in 393 AD. St. Jerome is credited with creating the Old Latin Vulgate, which was the outcome of the African Synods and was used as the Bible for centuries.

The Bible's last book to be penned was the Book of Revelation of John of Patmos in the late 80's early 90's AD. The first compilation of cannon did not come about until about three hundred years later at the Council of Hippo.

The iconic (though fictional) scene of Martin Luther nailing his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door until October 31, 1517, over a millennium after the composition of the Vulgate. The Kings James Version would make its debut in the year of 1611 (before the letter J existed, so the name “Jesus” did not appear once). Presently, I struggle to accept this book (a couple of iterations later) as the unadulterated word of God.

As a Missionary Baptist, I believe that God is living today and can play a very active role in our lives. If he would speak to John of Patmos about dragons, beasts, Jesus, and the anti-Christ, then surely he will speak to me on how to love my neighbor and myself. . . .

Hate, fear, depression, guilt, and pride are some of the traumas that can separate us from God. God is unconditional love. Any time one acts out of the parameters of unconditional love, she resides in a Godless place: Hell (the absence of God). If there is any word of King James’s Bible that is not in alignment with the nature of God, I will cast it far away. I will not insult the Creator of the universe to appease the ilk of men who found it necessary to censor the word of the living God. . . .

- https://www.huffingtonpost.com/alexander-j-barron/why-the-bible-is-not-the-_b_7717552.html

If Jesus tells me that His Word is truth, (John 17:17) and we are set apart as we read and apply it to our life, I am going to listen to Jesus rather than this man or any other man!

Secondly, and I can deal with much more of what he is wrongly saying, and that is that the Bible was not put together until 393 A. D.

What did the church do for almost 300 years, until the Bible was put together? That is ridiculous and foolish!

The early church had the letters that were written, the Gospels and they were encouraged to read them and circulate them around, so others can read them and there is evidence that this was done, historically speaking.

We are told,

The Epistle from the elders at the church in Rome to the Church at Corinth (commonly known as “1 Clement”) was written in the late first century AD, making it almost as old as the New Testament itself. The author overtly affirms Paul’s letter to the Corinthians as Scripture to be publicly read and cites from many of Paul’s other letters (along with frequent quotations from the book of Hebrews). There are also very plausible allusions to James, 1 Peter, and possibly Acts. The words of Jesus are referenced as well, though possibly from the author’s familiarity with the oral preaching of them since, technically, the gospels are not referenced as written sources. At any rate, considering this is only a single letter, it speaks volumes to see how much of the New Testament was referenced authoritatively. This is a rather powerful, early testimony to the authority of the New Testament in the first-century churches.

If one takes together all the writings of just the first decades of the second century (such as the letters of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Pseudo-Barnabas and the instructional works of the Didache, Papias, and Hermas) we find citations from every book of the New Testament except the tiny letters of Jude and 3 John. In fact, in just the one letter we have from Polycarp, 1 Peter is cited eight times, 1 Corinthians four times, 2 Corinthians two times, Galatians four times, 1 Timothy three times, 2 Timothy two times, Romans two times, 1 John one time, Philippians two times, and 2 Thessalonians two times. There is no question that these writers already knew most of the New Testament and wholly embraced it as divinely inspired and authoritative.

If we add in the writers from the rest of the second century, such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and the Muratorian Fragment, we also find direct quotations from Jude and most of these books are explicitly referred to as Scripture. That leaves only 3rd John without a direct reference during this time period, which is not surprising considering its particularly small size and personal nature. One can see clearly, then, that from the earliest times Christians widely embraced the New Testament as Scripture.

Along with this, there is further (though admittedly circumstantial) evidence given to us in the earliest manuscripts themselves. While there are presently no published copies of any New Testament documents dating to the first century, we have manuscripts going back to the second and third centuries for every book of the New Testament with the exception of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and 3 John. In most cases, we have multiple manuscripts this early, hinting at wide distribution and use. Of course, there are manuscripts of other Christian writings from this early, and even from some heretical writings and false gospels, so by itself, the mere existence of these manuscripts does not tell us that they were embraced as Scripture.

What is interesting is that, unlike other Christian writings or heretical works, there is evidence that, very early on, the Canonical works were gathered into specific collections. The four New Testament gospels are often found bound together, for example, while no other gospels are ever included or otherwise bound together in this way. At least one of these early collections, P-45, also contained the book of Acts. We likewise have collections of Paul's letters (often including the book of Hebrews, which many believed Paul wrote). There is even evidence that the Gospel of John may have sometimes been collected with John's letters and the book of Revelation.

Again, this kind of careful gathering by theme and author seems to be unique to the books of the New Testament canon. The only major exception does not come until well into the fourth century when an early collection of the whole Bible also includes The Epistle of Barnabas and Shepherd of Hermas appended at the end after the New Testament. This late exception, however, is easily explained by numerous fourth-century writers who suggest that these additional books, while not Scripture, are valuable and should be read privately to new converts, though never publicly in the gathering of the Church. . . .

The New Testament itself makes clear that these books were written to be Scripture and were received as such early on. The early writings of the Christians in the decades after the New Testament show an intimate knowledge of and reverent regard for these books, and sometimes even unambiguous statements that the books are Scripture. The early manuscript collections also provide us with circumstantial evidence of the unique place these books held in early churches. This evidence accords well with the testimony of the New Testament authors and other early Christians. It is rather clear that the earliest Christians did embrace the New Testament as Scripture.

- <https://carm.org/did-the-earliest-christians-accept-the-new-testament-as-scripture>

So, who are you going to listen to; the words of men or the Word of God? To me, it is easy. The one who loves me so much that He died for my sins is not going to give me something that is not true, something that will harm me or lead me astray. He holds His Word above His name and that says it all. Because if His Word is meaningless or untrue, then so is He! But, His Word is true, all of it, from Genesis through the book of Revelation!

And listen to what Peter has to say in II Peter 1:15-21 regarding God's Word. We are told, **“Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”**

Peter is telling us that they did not follow some fairy tale, but they saw the glorified Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration and some 30 years later it still shined brightly in his life. As real as Jesus was on that mountain, Peter tells us that God's prophetic word is even more sure than what he saw with his own eyes!

Here's the thing, if God's Word is important to us, if we glorify it, give it the respect that we should, then I believe the message will prosper because what is important to us others will desire!

I like what this person said of the Word of God. We are told,

This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrims' staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity."

How powerful that is. May we have such a passion to know God, to read His Word. May we have the heart of Dr. Livingstone regarding the Word of God. This famous missionary started his trek across Africa and he had 73 books in 3 packs, weighing some 180 pounds.

After they had traveled some 300 miles, Livingstone was obliged to throw away some of the books because of the fatigue of those carrying his baggage. As he continued on his journey his library grew less and less, until he had but one book left – his Bible!

And so, we see that Paul's prayer request was for ***PRAYER FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL***, giving God's Word the honor it deserves!

And the last point that Paul makes in these verses is this, ***PRAYER FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE GOSPEL!***

We see this in II Thessalonians 3:2 where Paul wrote, “**and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.**”

Paul’s prayer request is that the word of God would be preserved, that those coming against the Word of God, trying to extinguish the light would not succeed. There is a danger as you speak the Gospel message as Paul well understood. You can read of some of the things Paul went through as he spoke forth the Word of God in II Corinthians chapter 11.

Thus, Paul is asking for protection from the evil men, the unbelievers who hate the Gospel and are willing to persecute and even kill those who are proclaiming it! And please understand that these men were deceivers!

They seemed to have faith, but they came against the very faith that they said they believed and they hindered the Gospel message from going forward!

And I don’t believe that Paul’s primary concern was for his own safety but protection for him as he ministered the Gospel so that others could hear the Good News!

Let me share with you this story of a man who tried to destroy Christianity, to remove the Word of God from people’s lives. We are told,

Voltaire, the noted 18th century French philosopher, said that it took centuries to build up Christianity, but “I’ll show how just one Frenchman can destroy it within 50 years.” Taking his pen, he dipped it into the ink of unbelief and wrote against God.

Twenty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society purchased his house for printing the Bible. And it later became the Paris headquarters for the British and Foreign Bible society. The Bible is still a best-seller; an entire 6-volume set of Voltaire's works was once sold for 90 cents.

Just before his death, the noted atheist swore: "I wish I had never been BORN!"

- Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, 338

Never lose sight of the fact that God is sovereign, and He sees the big picture. His plan and purpose will come to pass and all He wants us to do is to follow Him, do the work He sent us to do!

People will try to destroy the messengers, but God is in control and in knowing that, all the persecution, all the stuff that may come upon your life, God will see you through and the Gospel message will go forth!

But never forget that there is a battle against the preaching of God's Word, make no mistake about it. John said in John 1:1-5, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.**"

John is saying that those who come against Jesus don't comprehend the message, they are trying to extinguish the message, put it out, but they will never be able to do that. What a great promise that is to us.

Thus, Paul's prayer request was for ***PRAYER FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE GOSPEL*** that the light of God's Word spoken through God's servants would not go out or be destroyed by evil men who were coming against the work!

As I close this morning, let me share with you these words from a pastor and his concern about the church today.

I've been pastor of the same congregation now for over 22 years, and do you want to know what causes trouble in the church? Absolutely nothing so much as confusing the gospel.

John Stott said that "The devil disturbs the church as much by error as by evil. When he cannot entice Christian people into sin, he deceives them with false doctrine."

"A church confused about the gospel is worse than worthless. It is a blocked emergency exit. It's an elevator to hell."

John Perkins has said, "Something is wrong at the root of American evangelicalism. I believe we have lost the gospel - God's reconciling power, which is unique to Christianity - and have substituted church growth. We have learned how to reproduce the church without the message."

Friends, moral scandals involving sex and money tarnish a church's witness. Family feuds can tear at a church. Gossip and envy, worldliness and selfishness can eat away at it. But teaching a false gospel kills it from its very core and center. It sets the whole course wrongly, its data is dirty, its assumptions are erroneous, its material is unsound. So, if you really want to trouble a church, start teaching a different gospel.

A church confused about the gospel is like a blind Uber driver. It's like a forgetful historian. It's like a colorblind artist. A church confused about the gospel is worse than worthless. It is a blocked emergency exit. It's an elevator to hell.

Pastors, this is one reason we have to keep on preaching the gospel. We have to make sure the next guy they hire after us is at least right on the gospel because everybody here must know and clearly understand the gospel. We must keep preaching the gospel.

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gospel-purity/excerpts/how-to-kill-a-church>

How true that is!

We have the truth of God that has impacted the world in a powerful way, may we not hide our light but shine brightly and may we ***PRAY FOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL, PRAY FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL, and PRAY FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE GOSPEL.***

And as Paul closed this section of II Thessalonians he is exhorting the Thessalonian believers and that is how I will close this study this morning to exhort you in the work that God has placed before you. May we be men and women of prayer, praying for each other!

Paul said this in II Thessalonians 3:3-5, **“But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.”**