

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **A People To Be Glad For and A People To Be Sad For 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 Part 1**

The plan of redemption is a bitter sweet reality. The sweetness comes in the contemplation of those who will receive eternal life. The bitterness comes in the contemplation of those who will suffer eternal damnation.

Little question exists for us, who know God's plan, it is a bitter sweet reality. To respond to God's word is joy and glory forever and to reject God's Word and salvation in Christ Jesus is shame and punishment and sorrow forever. God's plan of redemption is truly a bitter sweet reality. I will one day be in heaven because of this plan, but others I have known and loved will one day be eternally separated from God and in torment.

One might say that the high point of redemptive history, the apex, is God in Christ redeeming lost sinners for eternal glory. On the other hand the low point is God in Christ condemning lost sinners for eternal shame. The sweetness of God's redemptive plan is made more sweet when God in Christ Jesus redeems those who have had very little opportunity to know or understand the truth of the gospel. And we could say on the other hand that the bitterness of God's redemptive plan is made known more when God in Christ condemns those who have repeatedly, and stubbornly, in spite of wonderful opportunities rejected the gospel of God.

Let us consider Cain.

He is a graphic illustration of wasted opportunity. He had immense spiritual privilege. He was born to Adam. He had a father who had known sinlessness, and he had a father who had known sinfulness. There has never been a father that could have explained the benefits of sinlessness as well as Adam. And there has never been a father that could have explained the destructive consequences of sinfulness as well as Adam.

Adam had been in intimate fellowship with the Lord. He understood what it was to have a perfect unity and compatibility with a woman. He had unmitigated authority to be king of the earth and all the blessing of the fullness of God to support and sustain that. He understood and experienced personal unsoiled righteousness. He knew goodness in it's wholeness. All in the setting of the Garden of Eden. Who else but Adam has ever experienced these things? These blessings of days gone by must have been a very active part of his discussion with his sons. How could he not have talked about the Garden of Eden? How could he not have talked about his communion with God in the midst of that garden? How could he not have talked about how harmonious all of the world was? The sons of Adam certainly heard about the benefits of sinlessness.

But not only did they have the opportunity to hear the benefits of sinlessness, but they must have also have had the opportunity hear about the destructiveness of sin. When tears were shed how could Adam not have said this is the result of sin? When pain was experienced how could Adam not tell his children that this is the result of sin? When death was experienced how could he not say this is the result of sin?

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When in the afternoon there was a thunderous silence and the voice of the Lord was not being heard, how could Adam have not tell his children that this was the result of sin?

Cain was a person who had tremendous spiritual privilege. In all of these various experiences that Adam certainly related to his children, and I would think it would be very reasonable for us to conclude that he instructed Cain in the truth of God and about what pleased God.

I am sure that he must have instructed Cain about the Lord's will and about how to worship God, and how to respond to God. And yet Cain was an apostate. He rejected God, he rejected God's word, he rejected God's salvation.

He apparently, according to **Heb. 11:4** spurned righteousness in contrast with his brother Able who offered a better sacrifice.

He allowed Satan to take control of his life. **1 John 3:11-12** “for this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; (12) not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

And the scriptures leave no doubt as to the final destiny of his life. **Jude 11-13** “Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (12) These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; (13) wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

In the O.T. there is probably not a more tragic illustration of lost opportunity. But there is another equally powerful example of lost opportunity in the N.T. If Cain had the privilege of sitting at the feet of Adam, Judas had the greater privilege of sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Judas heard the teachings of Jesus, he saw the miracles of Jesus, he saw the love of Christ manifest to his friends as well as foes. He was able to witness Christ under the most intimate of circumstances having lived with him nearly three years and he was able to witness Christ under the most trying of circumstances. Judas, was every day, being given the opportunity to surrender himself to the Lord of Glory but he rejected God, he rejected Christ, he rejected the Word of God. He sold Jesus for money, committed suicide and went to eternal hell!!

Whether you are talking about Cain, or you are talking about Judas, you are talking about tragedy of mammoth proportions. When one is given unlimited opportunity to know God and then turns His back on it. The greater the opportunity, the greater the tragedy, the greater the eternal punishment.

When we think of the bitter sweet reality of God's redemptive plan there can be nothing quite so bitter as looking at these particular individuals and knowing that it should not have been this way.

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But in addition to these individuals there is a group of people who also illustrate the tragedy of rejected opportunity. They are the people who we know as the Jews. On a collective level they illustrate for us the ultimate tragedy of apostasy.

Having been given the privilege of having received the oracles of God, the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises nevertheless they rejected God, rejected God's Word, rejected God's messiah.

This was a tragedy. The Jewish people have always been in a position of great privilege but collectively they represent the greatest tragedy of lost opportunity in the scriptures. Again the bitter side of God's redemptive plan is illustrated, but God's redemptive plan is not just bitter. It is bitter sweet.

In contrast to the Jews you have the Thessalonians. Their opportunity to hear the gospel was very limited. It occurred over a matter of weeks. **Acts 17** tells us that Paul ministered in the synagogue for only three Sabbaths in Thessalonica. After this he apparently separated himself from the synagogue and continued his ministry in the community. But this ministry clearly was not very long before he was forced to leave.

In contrast to the Jewish people who had hundreds and hundreds of years to be exposed to the truth, they only had a matter of weeks. In contrast with the Jews who had all around them reminders, of the truth of God's Word whether in the temple services, the sacrifices or in respect the word that was read every Sabbath. The city of Thessalonica was a wicked and pagan city. Caught up in the vices of the world and as a major trade center exposed to every crackpot and charlatan. A city filled with every kind of teaching and philosophy. And yet though their opportunity was so very infinitesimal to assimilate and respond to God's Word they responded. This contrast was very much in the mind of Paul in the passage that we are beginning to examine this morning.

Let us begin by reading **V. 13** **“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (14) For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.** But now as soon as he mentioned the word “Jews” it is like his heart is pierced and and he immediately in his inspired remembrance recognizes how they are the very antithesis of how thankful he is for the Thessalonians. And we see him then launch in **VV. 15,16** **“who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, (16) hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.**

So in this section you have people to be glad for and a people to feel sad for. A people who are blessed and a people who are cursed. God through his many prophets offered his people blessing or cursing. Sadly they chose cursing. God through a few apostles offered the Thessalonians blessing or cursing and gladly they chose blessing.

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In these verses Paul relates to both. In these verses he gives reasons why he is glad for the Thessalonians and reasons why he is sad for the Jews. Let us begin by looking at the reasons why he is glad for the Thessalonians.

### 1. THEIR RECEPTION OF THE WORD (V. 12)

**“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the Word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”**

They were a church that had the right response to the Word of God. They were good soil. They had prepared hearts. The Thessalonians were willing to listen to the apostles, and what they had to say. When they heard what they had to say they believed that the message they heard was the message of God through the apostles.

Paul says to them I am so grateful for you. You did not receive it as the word of men. Not as another teaching from men, or philosophy from men. Not another religious leader simply spouting more rhetoric.

But how do we know when we have not just heard the Word of God but actually received the word of God? If God were at this very moment in time to speak to you how do you think you would respond? Well, after you had pulled up your face out of the dust of the ground. Wouldn’t you say, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” If He were to say, “jump,” we would say “how high?” If He were to say, “run,” we would say, “how fast?” If He were to say, “work,” we would say, “how hard?”

If God were to say to us “I want you to read 1 Thess. 5 times tonight.” What would you be doing tonight? We would be reading 1 Thess. 5 times. If I were to ask you to read 1 Thess. 5 times you might say, I have other things to do, or I do not have enough time, or I just don’t want to. Why would you respond that way? It is because you consider me a man and you have options. But when Paul and his companions spoke, the Thessalonians did not think that they had options.

This is one of the great truths of the Christian life. God works through his Word. We cannot prosper unless we understand this truth. How does God work through his Word?

It saves us. 1 Pet. 1:23 “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.

It blesses us. Luke 11:28 “But He said, “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it.”

It teaches us, reproves us, corrects us and trains us in righteousness. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

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It guides us. Ps. 119:105 “Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.”

It counsels us. Ps. 119:24 “Thy testimonies also are my delight; they are my counselors.”

It makes us fruitful. Col. 1:5-6 “because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, (6) which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.

It grows us up. 1 Pet. 2:2 “therefore putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, (2) like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.

It warns us and rewards us. Ps. 19:11 “More by them thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

It judges us. Heb. 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It sanctifies us. John 17:17 “Sanctify them in truth, thy Word is truth.”

It purges us. John 15:3

It frees us. John 8:31-32 “Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

It gives us joy. 1 John 1:4 “And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”

It protects us. Ps. 119:11 “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

It strengthens us. Ps. 119:28 “My soul weeps because of grief; Strengthen me according to Thy word.”

It makes us wise. Ps. 119:97-100 “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed thy precepts.”

It gives us hope. Ps. 119:147 “My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on thy word.

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And this is not an exhaustive list. It works in us the Psalmist may have summarized it all in Ps. 19 “The law of the Lord is perfect restoring the soul, the testimony of the word is sure making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right...” It is a people to be glad for who receive the word of God. The words of man no matter how intelligent or brilliant cannot produce these results.

These Thessalonians received the Word of God into their hearts not as the word of men but rather as the word of God. The word of men you can ignore or compromise but they did not do this and they were reaping the results of this commitment in their lives. The word of God was working in them because they believed, “**which also performs its work in you who believe.**” Believe what? That the words the apostles were sharing with them were truly the word of God.

### 2. THE SECOND REASON WHY PAUL WAS GLAD WAS BECAUSE OF THEIR PERSEVERANCE IN SUFFERING.

Let us read **V. 14 “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. “ How did they do this? “for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.”**

Judean churches had come through a lot of persecution. The persecution started in Jerusalem and spread to Judea. And what is so ironic, is who was the one that provided leadership to the persecution of the Judean churches? It was Paul. In fact after Paul’s conversion is spelled out to us in **Acts 9:1-30** it then immediately says in **V. 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace.**

Paul personally witnessed the steadfastness of the Judean churches against his own assault. He is now commending the Thessalonians because they are presently handling their present persecution by the hands of their own countrymen in that very same steadfast way.

### CONCLUSION

GOD’S REDEMPTIVE PLAN IS A BITTER SWEET REALITY. IT IS SWEET WHEN WE CONTEMPLATE THOSE WHO WILL RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE.

BUT IT DOES NOT GET ANY SWEETER THAN WHEN WE CONTEMPLATE THE SALVATION OF THOSE WHO HAVE HAD EVERYTHING WORKING AGAINST THEM AND YET IN THE PROVIDENCE AND MERCY OF GOD COME TO RECEIVE THE WORDS OF THE SCRIPTURES, NOT AS THE WORD OF MEN BUT RATHER THE WORD OF GOD, WHO THEN ARE ABLE TO PERSEVERE IN THEIR OBEDIENCE EVEN UNDER THE MOST ADVERSE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.