

## 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 — A Story Of Sadness Or Gladness

**March 17, 2024**

Good morning, CrossWinds! Years ago, I spent time in the local high school as a youth pastor. I was a wrestling coach and practice dummy. As a former college wrestler, most students were easy to throw around, except for one. He was taller than me, about 50 pounds heavier than me. He wasn't carrying extra weight. He was a beast. He threw me around. In wrestling, he always placed in the state finals. He was also excellent in football. He came from a modest family, but his athletic abilities opened doors of opportunity. He was given a full-ride scholarship to Michigan State for football. If anyone needed that kind of opportunity, it was him. He earned it with his athletic skills in multiple sports.

Unfortunately, all of it went down the drain. At college, he joined the drinking crowd. After a few offenses for alcohol, he lost his full-ride scholarship his freshman year. He never started in a college game or became a professional athlete. All of his future was squandered. He had such potential but threw it all away.

Having a great opportunity but throwing it all away happened in the Bible, not just everyday life. In the Old Testament, an example of this is Cain. Cain's parents were Adam and Eve. They were the only humans to know sinless perfection and then to lose it. They walked with God. They were directly created by God. They didn't have belly buttons. They knew the joy of life before sin and how difficult life after sin. Imagine sitting at the dinner table with Adam and Eve as your parents. Imagine all the dinner-time conversations about walking with

God in the Garden of Eden and the goodness of God that was lost through a sinful choice. Cain had immense privilege. He had good parents who taught him well, but he turned his back on God, pursued sin, and murdered Abel, his brother. Look what the Bible says about this.

We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 1 John 3:12 (ESV)

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain... Jude 11 (ESV)

Put yourself in Adam and Eve's shoes. They raised Cain and Abel the same way. They taught Cain and Abel about God. They pleaded with both of their sons to follow God, but despite the immense privileges both of them had, one of them, Cain, turned to the path of sin and murdered his brother. What a tragedy. What a waste of opportunity.

In the New Testament, another person who wasted great privilege is Judas. Cain sat at Adam's feet. Judas sat at Jesus' feet. Judas was loved by Jesus. In the Last Supper, he sat in the place of privilege next to Jesus. Judas saw Jesus' miracles with his own eyes. He saw Jesus raise people from the dead. He watched Jesus heal people with leprosy and supernaturally restore their missing limbs and fingers. He saw Jesus give sight to the blind man and hearing to the deaf man. Judas knew the sinless perfection of Jesus' character. Judas lived with Jesus for three years and never saw one sin in his life. Judas' position in life allowed him to know Jesus better than almost anyone else on the planet. Yet Judas rejected Jesus, betrayed him for money, committed suicide, and went to hell. What a tragedy. What a wasted opportunity.

When it comes to Cain and Judas, we are talking about tragedies of massive proportions, where people were given great privilege from God, but they tragically turned their back on God and ended up facing eternal punishment.

In addition to Cain and Judas, there is a collective group of people in the Bible, who span both the Old and New Testaments, who were also given immense privileges from God, but on a collective level, they rejected that and will face just condemnation for that. This group is the Jewish people.

As Paul says in Romans 9, as a people, they were given the privilege of being God's chosen people. God gave his Word to them. God gave his prophets to them. God entered into a covenant with them. On Mount Sinai, he came down and gave his laws to them. He sent Jesus, his own son, as a Jew to save them. Yet, for the most part, as a collective entity, the Jews squandered that immense privilege. They rejected Jesus, and as a result, they will be eternally condemned even though they are God's chosen people. That is a tragedy

In contrast to the Jews, we have the Thessalonians. Their opportunity to hear the gospel was very limited. Paul was in the city four or five weeks before he was run out of town. While the Thessalonians had limited opportunity to believe, as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1, they had genuine faith, not fake faith.

As we turn to 1 Thessalonians this morning, we will look at 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16. These verses are a contrast. In these verses Paul explains why he is glad for the Thessalonians and their genuine faith, then he contrasts them with the Jews, and explains why he is sad for them. While they were given many opportunities, they reject the faith.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last! 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16 (ESV)

If you have been with us, you know how thrilled Paul is with the Thessalonians. They are a new church. Paul was only in town a few weeks before the Jews in the city ran him out of town. He spent chapter 1 telling the Thessalonians how thankful he was for them and their genuine faith. Then, last week, in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul spent time defending himself from all the false accusations the Jews in the city leveled against him. Paul was not a quack. He wasn't using religion as a way to fleece money from people. While in Thessalonica, he paid his own way and refused to take money from anyone. Paul was also not trying to be a religious man to gain sexual favors from women or inflate his ego.

In city after city, Paul suffered when he told people about Jesus. What was in it for him? Why did he travel the world telling people about Jesus when he know he would suffer for doing it?

He was simply being faithful to the assignment Jesus gave him, which was to tell people the good news of salvation by Jesus alone.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, Paul takes time to thank God for the Thessalonians who received Jesus and faithfully followed him even with limited

opportunity, then he contrasts them with the Jews who rejected Jesus even though God gave them unlimited opportunity.

That is the way we will break apart our study. First, why are the Thessalonians a story of gladness? Then, why are the Jews a story of sadness?

### **Why are the Thessalonians a story of gladness?**

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. 1  
Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

#### **They received the Word as God's Word, not man's Word.**

...when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God...

They had the right response to the Word of God. When they listened to the words Paul spoke to them, they heard Paul's words not just as a man's words but for what it really was, which was the Word of God. Paul did the speaking, but God was the source of the message. They heard the words through Paul, but Paul's message was God's message. Paul shared with them the gospel message. That message was God's gospel, not Paul's gospel.

Paul didn't make up the gospel message. The gospel message is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. When we ask Jesus' death to pay for our sins, He will. When we ask Jesus' death to pay for our sins, we invite Jesus to be in charge of our lives. When Jesus resurrected us to new life, when we trust in Him to save us, he resurrects us to new life. That message was not something Paul made up. It is not something he found while in a Bible study. He didn't go to ChatGPT and ask it how to be made right with God. The gospel wasn't a committee decision. The gospel message, the significance of who Jesus is, what

Jesus did on the cross, and what trusting in Jesus to save us from our sins does in our lives is a message that came directly from God. Let me show you some places you find this in the Bible.

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, Acts 8:14 (ESV)

The Samaritans received the word of God. What had they received? It was the gospel message about Jesus. They received it and believed it. The apostles were very clear that the message was God's word, not their word. All they had done was pass along the message God gave them. When the apostles spoke about Jesus, it wasn't them giving their opinion about Jesus. It is what God told them was the truth about Jesus and what happened on the cross and with the empty tomb.

As you will remember from the first week of our study, Thessalonica was the crossroads to the world. They were a seaport city and a big layover location on the Via Egnatia highway to Rome. You will remember from the first week of our study that the city was home to temples for deities from around the world; there were deities from Egypt and the Far East. The Thessalonians were used to hearing different human opinions about life, God, and the world. The city was a mixing pot of religions and ethnic groups.

Paul celebrates that the Thessalonians, when they heard the gospel message about Jesus, didn't consider the gospel just another religious truth equal to the hundreds of others in the city. They recognized the gospel message as not another human opinion but as the very words of God.

Let's look at some more Scripture that reinforces the truth that the gospel message is not a human creation, it is a direct message from God so we know it is true.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of [the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,...](#) For I delivered to you as of first importance [what I also received](#): that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:1 and 3 (ESV)

Paul didn't make up the good news of Jesus. His death and resurrection and their significance for our lives are a message that he received, not a message he created. Who gave it to him?

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. [For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.](#) Galatians 1:11–12 (ESV)

The first thing Paul was glad for about the Thessalonians, and that we should celebrate whenever it happens among us, is when people hear the gospel, they do not hear it as another human opinion. They do not file in on the self with the thousands of other man-made religious philosophies on the planet. Instead, they recognize the gospel message of salvation by faith alone in Jesus alone as a message given to us directly from God. That is why we know it is trustworthy.

The gospel message is not the only direct message from God. The Bible tells us the words of the prophet in the Old Testament are also direct and trustworthy messages from God.

[For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.](#) 2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)

In addition, the Bible tells us all of the words of Scripture are trustworthy and true.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

All of the Bible is God's very breath. While God spoke through the prophets and apostles, he had them say exactly what he wanted them to say. Human beings stutter and make mistakes when they speak. God doesn't make mistakes when he speaks. He says exactly what he wants to say without error. That is why we can trust the gospel message. That is why we can trust the Bible's message.

Not only did the Thessalonians receive the gospel message from Paul as God's words to them, but God began using the gospel message to save them and transform them.

If people read the Bible but consider it nothing more than the words of a man being simple human speculation, the gospel message and God's words will prove inert in their lives. The gospel message will not connect with them. It will not save them. It will not be used by God to transform them. This is important. It is only when someone considers the gospel message and God's word for what it is, that is, the very words of God to us given to save us, that God uses them to save souls and transform lives.

The last phrase in this verse reads as follows:

...which is at work in you believers. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

Paul says that the gospel message when the Thessalonians accepted it for what it truly is, that is, the word of God, not another human opinion, that unleashed the power of the gospel in their life. It went to work saving and transforming them. The same is true for us. When we accept the gospel



message as the trustworthy and true word from God as the only way to be made right with God, at that point, the gospel message and the Word of God go to work, changing us.

The next question is, what work does the Word of God do in us when it goes to work in us? Here are a few of the many things God's word works in us when we consider it for what it truly is.

It saves us.

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

It blesses us.

But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Luke 11:28 (ESV)

It guides us.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105 (ESV)

It counsels us.

Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors. Psalm 119:24 (ESV)

It grows us up.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

It judges us.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

It frees us.

"If you abide in my word...the truth will set you free." John 8:31–32 (ESV)

It gives us joy.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. 1 John 1:4 (ESV)

It protects us from sin.

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11 (ESV)

It strengthens us in times of brokenness.

My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word! Psalm 119:28 (ESV)

That is not an exhaustive list. It is only the beginning of a list of everything the Word of God does in us when we consider it not as another human opinion but as inerrant words from God that is the only right opinion.

No matter how brilliant people are, no matter how educated, no matter how wise or eloquent, man's words cannot perform the task of God's Word to create and sustain spiritual life.

**They imitated seasoned Christians.**

For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.... 1 Thessalonians 2:14a (ESV)

Not only did they imitate seasoned churches, but they imitated and learned from seasoned Christians.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,... 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)

As Paul was getting this church off the ground, I imagine everyone was looking for a model to follow. They needed seasoned Christians to learn from and seasoned churches to imitate. Paul probably told them about the churches in Judea so they could learn from them. The churches in Judea were the churches

around Jerusalem. They were older churches with mature Christians. These churches existed 7 years before a missionary effort began outside that area.

The highest form of honor is imitation. The Thessalonians were honoring the churches in Judea and mature Christians by patterning their lives after them.

In some ways, this shows the strength of their spiritual commitment. They didn't just trust in Jesus, but they wanted to learn from and follow others when it came to living for Jesus.

There was one particular area where they imitated the churches of Judea.

**They persevered in times of suffering.**

The Judean churches had it difficult. Persecution in the church of Jerusalem began with the stoning of Stephen. After that, the church in Jerusalem scattered. The leader of the persecution against the Christians in Jerusalem was Saul. In Acts 9, Jesus appeared to Saul on the Damascus road. Saul, the persecutor, realized he was playing for the wrong team, and in that chapter, he became Paul the Christian. Acts 9 tells us that after Saul the persecutor became Paul the Christian, the churches in Judea finally had a little peace from the Jews that were persecuting them because Paul led that persecution. When he changed teams, there was a break in the persecution. That peace didn't last long. Soon, Jewish persecution broke out again. The difference was this time they were also after Paul.

The Judean churches endured persecution, hostility, and difficulty from the Jews. They set an example for the Thessalonians to follow when they endured persecution and hostility from the Jews in their city.

...For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,... 1 Thessalonians 2:14b (ESV)

So, the little church in Thessalonica did not give up or give in under pressure. Even though they were brand new in Jesus, when they were persecuted, they followed the example of the churches in Judea, which were much older and had endured suffering for Jesus. They chose the right Christian heroes.

Remember how this started in Acts 17.

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar,... Acts 17:4–5 (ESV)

The Jews were jealous. They hired goons from the marketplace to form a mob and set the city into an uproar against the new Christians and the young church. They tried to frame the Christians and claim they were treasonous against Rome, which would bring the weight of the Roman government against the church. The Romans would do their dirty work for them.

Isn't this the same thing the Jews in Jerusalem did with the crucifixion of Jesus? Didn't they claim Jesus was a rebel and that he needed to be crucified? Didn't they try to get the Romans to do their dirty work?

Who paid for the troublemakers in the market to create the riot in the city? The Jews did.

There were three things Paul was glad for regarding the Christians in Thessalonica. First, they received the gospel message as the Word of God, not another human opinion. Two, they honor and learn from mature Christians and older churches. Three, they persevered in times of suffering.

As Paul finishes what he was glad for about the Thessalonians, it triggers a contrast in his mind about what he was sad about with the Jews.

### **Why are the Jews a story of sadness?**

Paul had a running conflict with the Jews, even though he was a highly educated and respected one. Acts 9 starts off with Saul on his way to persecute Christians. Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road. He became a Christian and began preaching about Jesus by the end of the chapter. In the same chapter as Paul's conversion, the Jews make their first attempt to murder Paul. It didn't take long for them to turn hostile to him and hate him. The Christians had to let Paul out of the city by lowering him in a basket down the wall. Things don't change. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas head out to preach the gospel, and the Jews stir up persecution against them. In Acts 14, the Jews incite a mob to assault Paul, mistreat him, and stone him. We have another attempted execution of Paul by the Jews. In Acts 17, nothing changes. The Jews were jealous of Paul and the church in Thessalonica, so they hired thugs from the marketplace to riot against Paul and the church and run him out of town. In Acts 20, there was another plot against Paul by the Jews. They try to assassinate him again. Only one chapter later, in Acts 21, Paul is back in Jerusalem, and the Jews try to kill Paul again. Thankfully, he was rescued. It goes on like that until the end of the book.

In 2 Corinthians, look what Paul says about the Jews.

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 2 Corinthians 11:24 (ESV)

Imagine that. It was torture to be whipped once. He was whipped almost 200 times for speaking about Jesus. While the Jews are God's chosen people, they strongly opposed the gospel message and anyone who told people the truth about Jesus. Remember how privileged they are. Paul writes about this in Romans 9.

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. Romans 9:4–5 (ESV)

They are God's chosen people. They have God's law. They have God's promises. The heroes of the past were Jewish. Jesus is Jewish. How much better can it get? How much more privileged can it be? Jesus says this.

Salvation is from the Jews. John 4:22 (ESV)

Despite having all of these opportunities and privileges from God, they rebelled against Him. They had unlimited privileges from God as His chosen people, but they turned their backs on Jesus. Contrast that with the Thessalonians who had only weeks to hear about Jesus, yet embraced the gospel message and were transformed by it.

Jewish opposition to Jesus and the gospel message has led to some Christians becoming anti-semitic. They don't like Jewish people because of their historical opposition to Jesus and the gospel. Despite the Jewish rejection of Jesus and the gospel, we are still to love the Jews and continue to hold out the gospel to them. As Jesus hung on the cross after being condemned to death at the demand of the Jews, he said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Stephen, who was the first Christian martyr, said this about the

Jews who were stoning him, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” It was Paul who, after being whipped by the Jews 5 times and enduring multiple execution attempts on his life by the Jews, said this.

...that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. Romans 9:2–3 (ESV)

Paul said that if he could lose his salvation for the Jews to gain salvation, he would gladly do it because he loved his people. The only proper attitude toward the Jews who killed Jesus, who killed the prophets, who killed the apostles, who tried to kill Paul, and who oppose the gospel message today is to forgive them and not hold their sin against them.

While we forgive Jews who oppose Jesus and the gospel, it is still right to be grieved for them. Look what Jesus said about the Jews who would reject him and execute him when he approached Jerusalem.

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Luke 19:41–42 (ESV)

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, he wept over Jerusalem. He was their long-awaited king who came to save them, but he knew they would reject him. He knew they were going to crucify him. He grieved over the many opportunities and privileges that they squandered away. For that, Jesus knew there would be consequences.

For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.” Luke 19:43–44 (ESV)

You didn't recognize when God came to you and when peace was offered. Because of that, you are going to be destroyed. Specifically, Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in 70 A.D. The prideful Jews decided they would stop paying taxes to the Romans. The Romans negotiated with them for a long time, hoping to have them see the foolishness of their ways, but the Jews refused to listen. As a result, the Romans decided to make an example out of them. The Roman legions surrounded the city, cutting it off from food and water. They starved the city to death; then, when the city was at its weakest point, they stormed in, killing 1.1 million people. After that, the Romans ransacked 985 Jewish towns around Jerusalem, killing hundreds of thousands more Jewish people. It was a holocaust of massive proportions. It was also the judgment of God falling on the Jews of that generation for rejecting and crucifying Jesus.

Rejecting God's purposes for them was a long-running practice of the Jews. They didn't just reject Jesus in the New Testament, but they consistently rejected God's purposes for them in the Old Testament. They rebelled in the wilderness as soon as they left Egypt. They worshipped a golden calf while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, getting the Ten Commandments from the hand of God. An entire generation was killed and never made it to the Promised Land because after seeing the plagues against Egypt and walking across the Red Sea on dry ground, they constantly rebelled against God and would not obey him. They were bitten by snakes for rebelling against God. When they entered the Promised



Land, after all God did for them, they quickly turned from God and became idol worshippers.

As a people, why did the Jews constantly reject God's kindness to them? Why did they reject Jesus when he came to them? It all boils down to their desire to create a righteousness before God of their own doing and not submitting to God giving them a righteousness from Jesus by faith alone. Look how Paul writes about this in Romans 10.

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Romans 10:2–3 (ESV)

As a people group, the Jews wanted to behave their way to God. The problem is our righteousness before God will never be good enough. As we saw last week, God doesn't just judge our actions; he judges our words, our thoughts, everything we look at on our phones, our hidden motives, and our dreams. If that is the case, how could anyone think they can justify themselves before God by how they behave? The only way to be made right with God must be with a righteousness that comes from God by Jesus Christ. There is never enough righteousness that comes from ourselves.

Look what Jesus said about Jerusalem as he looked over the city as he went into the city.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Matthew 23:37 (ESV)

Are there Jews who accepted Jesus? Yes, of course, there was and always will be. The problem is the vast majority of Jews, despite the immense

privileges God has given them, insist on trying to make themselves right with God by their behavior. That is exactly what the Orthodox Jew told me when I sat next to him on the plane a few weeks ago. He had his long hair, black hat, white shirt, black pants, and prayer cloth on his belt. I asked him how he was made right with God, and he told me we try really hard. The problem is none of us can try hard enough. We need righteousness from Jesus because our righteousness will never be enough.

The good news of Israel's hard heart is that it resulted in God extending the good news of Jesus to us. The hardness of Israel's heart resulted in the gospel being brought to us as Gentiles. The good news for the Jews is their hardness of heart will not persist forever. One day, Israel as a nation will eventually get it. They will turn in mass to Jesus and be saved.

...I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved,... Romans 11:25–26 (ESV)

The Jews at the time of Paul and Jesus, and for the most part, the Jews today, are a people to be sad for because they had the greatest of opportunities with God, but they killed the prophets in the Old Testament. They killed Jesus in the New Testament, and they tried to kill anyone who tells people the good news so they can be saved. As a result, they are lost without Jesus, and even though they are God's chosen people, they will be justly damned to hell without Jesus.

Let's get back to 1 Thessalonians.

**They oppose the Word of God.**

...who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 1 Thessalonians 2:15 (ESV)

...who killed the Lord Jesus...

It is clear who killed Jesus. The Romans executed Jesus, but it was a Jewish plan to kill Jesus. The Jewish people called on Caesar to crucify Jesus. They wanted Jesus dead.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Acts 2:22–23 (ESV)

...and the prophets...

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, Acts 7:51–52 (ESV)

Killing Jesus was nothing new. The Jews always killed God’s prophets in the past. It says they killed the prophets in the Old Testament who announced the coming of Jesus. Isaiah is one of the Old Testament prophets who frequently speaks about Jesus. Isaiah 52 and 53 are sometimes considered the fifth gospel because they speak so clearly about Jesus’ death and resurrection hundreds of years before it happened. Hebrews 11 talks about those the Jews persecuted by sawing them in half. That is a reference to King Manasseh who sawed the prophet Isaiah in half after he spoke so clearly about Jesus.

...and drove us out...

That means to persecute us or to push us out by making life so unbearable that they are forced to leave. They did that to Paul in Thessalonica and many other cities.

They drove Paul out because they hate to hear the truth. There are many Jews who are still like that today. Just this past week, I was talking with another orthodox Jew who does not want to hear the truth. Today, it is not just Jews who are hostile to the gospel message, but it is also many Gentiles who are equally hostile in our culture to the preaching of the good news of Jesus that changes lives. This is tragic. It is especially tragic who have received so much from God but then reject salvation from God.

### **They opposed Christian leaders.**

The Thessalonians honored the saints. The Jews went out of their way to stop Christian leaders from sharing the gospel with other people.

...oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved... 1 Thessalonians 2:15–16 (ESV)

The Thessalonians were imitating mature Christians. The Jews were opposing mature Christians, trying to prevent them from sharing the good news of Jesus. They are hostile to all men and to God by opposing the gospel message so they can keep men and women in their sins so they can never be saved.

Acts show this happening as the apostles shared about Jesus in Jerusalem.

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Acts 4:18 (ESV)

...and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Acts 5:40 (ESV)

This is what the Jews always did and have done. They attempt to silence the gospel preachers, kill the prophets, persecute the apostles, stone them to death, anything to keep Christians from sharing the good news.

**They fill up their sins to the limit.**

...so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last! (forever) 1 Thessalonians 2:16 (ESV)

These are scary words. They fill up the measure of their sins to the limit, and as a result, God's wrath has come upon them at last.

What does it mean to fill up the measure of their sins? There is a predefined limit when God says enough is enough when it comes to sin and rebellion. After that, God pours out his wrath against sin. This is what happened with Sodom and Gomorrah. This happened when God decided to no longer tolerate the sin of his people in the Old Testament so he sent them into exile in Babylon. This happened in 70 A.D. with the destruction of Jerusalem.

Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. Matthew 23:32 (ESV)

Just as your fathers filled up the full measure of their sin against God, the Jews, with their persecution of the church and Christians, were doing the same thing.<sup>1</sup>

...But wrath has come upon them at last (forever)! 1 Thessalonians 2:16 (ESV)

Speaking of the Jews, Paul ends by saying the wrath of God has come upon them at last. If you check the footnote in your Bible, you will see the last word can also be translated as forever, that is the eternal wrath of God in the lake

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of God limiting sin and filling up sins to the point of completion is first found in Genesis 15:16 when God speaks about the sin of the Amorites: "And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

of fire. That is what the Jews's rejection of Jesus has led to. Even though they are God's chosen people and have enjoyed immense privileges from God, their rejection of Jesus leads to them experiencing the eternal wrath of God.

### **Application**

I know what you are thinking. Pastor Kurt, thank you for the Bible study but I have no idea how this applies to me. I am glad you asked that question.

There is a dividing line that runs through the center of history. On one side of it are people like the Thessalonians. They only had a brief opportunity to hear about Jesus, but they trusted the gospel message as the very words of God give to save them. They were saved and transformed by that message. They even started learning from mature Christians, and we were willing to endure persecution for Jesus, even though they had only known Jesus for a matter of weeks.

On the other side of the line are people like the Jewish race. They had incredible favor from God, wonderful privilege from God as his chosen people, as the people through whom God sent his prophet and gave his law, as the people through whom God sent His son, Jesus, the savior of the world. Yet, in spite of such favor, they squandered it all turning their back on Jesus, even bringing suffering to those who share the good news of the gospel to try and keep even Gentiles from being saved. As a result, while they enjoy the favor of God, eternally, they will suffer the wrath of God.

The question is, what side of that line are you on?

My heart thinks of some of us who have sat in church for years. We have heard the good news of what Jesus has done for us week after week. We have

had the Bible opened to us again and again, but instead of treasuring the gospel message and the Bible as the truth, as the very words of God given to us to save us in a world of spiritual confusion, we consider the Bible and the gospel as just another flawed human opinion in our pluralistic world. If that is you today, know that belief system will send you to hell right next to the Jews. Today, I beg you to change. Decide that the gospel message and the Bible are the truth, the very words of God given to us to save. When you make that decision, I guarantee you that you will find God using the truth of the gospel and the Word of the Bible to breathe new life into you, to save your life, and to transform your world.



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