

**“The Life-Changing Word”
I Thessalonians 2:13-16**

**Mililani Community Church
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September 19, 1999**

Rosario Rivera was an embittered Marxist living in Lima, Peru. She had been an associate of Che Guevara before he was killed. She hated Christianity. Luis Palau, the great South American evangelist, took his ministry to Lima and was involved in radio and television outreach. Rosario heard Luis preaching over the air and determined that she was going to kill him! She went to the bullring where the evangelistic meetings were being held—and when the invitation was given, she went forward. Not because her heart was open to receive Christ, but because she had a weapon and she was going to kill the evangelist!

As she walked with the others toward the platform, a woman stepped over to her side and said: “May I be of some spiritual help to you?” And that further infuriated her. She struck the woman and then became panic-stricken, fled the grounds and disappeared among the crowd. But she could not get away from the message she had heard that night in the bullring. She could not escape the message of the gospel of Christ. And she received Christ as her personal savior!

News of her testimony spread around the world—and her work in Peru and throughout South America in testifying for Christ and seeking to improve the economic and social conditions of the people. Word even reached Europe where Luis Palau first heard about this woman—her desire and attempt to assassinate him, and then her remarkable conversion to Christ.

Later Luis returned to Lima, Peru where he met his former enemy, now a partner in the gospel of Christ! A radical transformation of an embittered, angry, Communist—an enemy of Christ and Christ’s servants, now serving the Lord in South America.

Rosario Rivera’s story illustrates again the power of the gospel to transform lives. As Paul declared in Romans 1:16: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes...”*

This morning we come to chapter 2 verse 13, where Paul states that the gospel he preached—was not his own message, it was God’s message—it was the Word of God, not the word of men: ***“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe”*** (2:13). Paul’s drive and forcefulness in preaching the gospel did not come from some thought that he was keeping up with the latest trends in philosophy or religion or science, but the deep conviction that he was sharing a message that originated with God.

Basically there are only two religions in the world:

First, the religions of man, which are composed of men's theories and men's ideas as they search for God. These religions are compilations of the reasonings and the philosophies of men as they look for answers to the problems that all thinking men face: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is the purpose of life?

The other religion is revealed religion—the religion that God has revealed to man. *Only two religions*: What man has conceived of, and what God has revealed. In the Bible we have the religion God has revealed. The Bible is like a solid rock in the midst of a desert of shifting sand. It is the most precious object on the earth today. Abraham Lincoln called it “*God’s best gift to man.*” Daniel Webster said, “*If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering and to prosper. But if we or our posterity neglect it and its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity.*” Those were prophetic words for our times.

Paul says, “*When I came to Thessalonica, I wasn’t coming with another man-made religion.*” Thessalonica was full of them. Honolulu is full of them—man-made religions. “*But I came to you with the message from God. You accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ for what it really is—the word of God.*”

The word “*accept*” means more than to simply intellectually agree with or affirm the truth of the Word of God. It means to “welcome” God’s Word into our hearts and lives.

TRANS> What happens when we truly accept the Word of God?

I. GOD’S WORD PRODUCES CHANGE

As Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica, the Thessalonians welcomed it into their hearts and lives and it changed their lives! The real Word of God always changes people and makes them different. To merely *mentally accept* it does not change anyone, but when we *welcome* it into our lives and *act* on it and *obey* it, we will be permanently changed; the Word of God will make us into different people.

The Bible itself makes that claim in Hebrews 4:12: “*For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*”

God through His Word, analyzes our motives, helps us see that what we have been thinking is wrong and then corrects that thinking.

That is what Second Timothy 3:16 says:

All Scripture is inspired by God [breathed out by God] and profitable [all Scripture is useful] for TEACHING [for instructing you about things you could never know otherwise], for REPROOF [telling you what has gone wrong in your life], for CORRECTION [instructing you on the changes you need to make], and for TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS [the practical guidelines to truth: how to

react to situations, how to handle your anger, your sex drive, or whatever it may be}, {2 Tim 3:16 RSV}

ILLUSTRATION: Most of us are familiar with the story of *The Mutiny on the Bounty*. In the nineteenth century, mutineers took over the ship, set their captain adrift in a lifeboat, and ended up at last on Pitcairn Island in the South Pacific. But that is only part of the story. We do not often hear much about what happened to them after they landed. These rough, tough, godless sailors, together with the wives they had taken with them from the island of Tahiti, spent their days on Pitcairn drinking, gambling, carousing and fighting with one another. Soon the fighting led to battle. One by one they killed each other off until the colony was reduced to a handful of people. Among them was a man named Alexander Smith. Rummaging through his trunk one day, he found a Bible that his mother had put there. He began to read it, and soon it changed his life. As he read it to the survivors, a dramatic change began taking place in their lives as well. When that island was rediscovered by outsiders some years later, the inhabitants had become a model community. There was no jail because they had no crime. They loved God and they loved each other. The Book had totally changed their lives and their society!

TRANS> The Apostle Paul says that this wonderful life-changing Word has another remarkable power—the power to arouse violent opposition:

II. GOD’S WORD AROUSES OPPOSITION

“¹⁴...You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved...” (2:14-16)

Throughout history, every generation of Christians has known persecution and martyrdom. Christians have been bound in animal skins and left to die in the hot sun, thrown into lion’s dens, burned alive, and exiled.

**Why such violent opposition to this Word with its power to bless and transform?
There are three major reasons:**

FIRST, it is clear from the Bible that...

1. THE GOSPEL IGNORES ALL HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

God is not impressed with degrees and awards and position and wealth or any other trappings of power. Even religious achievements and good moral values are not sufficient to earn any spiritual merit. We all must come to God in the same simple way: by admitting we cannot help ourselves and by accepting salvation as a gift from God through Jesus Christ. As the old hymn puts it, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”

Jesus himself said, ***“I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me”*** (John 14:6). You may believe in God, but you will never know Him as your heavenly Father unless you come to Him through faith in Jesus. John 1:12 says: ***“But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God.”***

That makes a lot of people very angry, but it shouldn't because much of life is like that: The telephone company insists that you have to get the correct numbers in sequence when you use the telephone. You don't have the liberty to come up with an arrangement of your own liking. You have to get them just right. God insists that there is only ONE WAY to be reconciled to Him, and that is through Jesus Christ. Religious performance does not impress God. The only way to be right with God is the way He has revealed: Romans 3:22-24 says: ***“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”***

The SECOND reason the gospel arouses violent opposition is that...

2. THE GOSPEL EXPOSES HUMAN PRIDE

There is a terrible evil in all of us that we try to hide. That evil is pride. Pride says, “I don't need any help. I can make it on my own.” In Genesis 4 you recall the story of how Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil, but Abel brought a bleeding lamb. The text says that the LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering but he did not look with favor on Cain and his offering—

Why? Because God had already revealed that the way to approach a holy God was through sacrifice; and the bleeding lamb that Abel brought pointed to the sacrifice that Christ would make on the cross—but the fruits of the soil that Cain brought represented man's attempts to save himself by human works and religious performance.

The Bible says that Cain became very angry, and his face was downcast. Verse 6: *“⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”*

What was the sin crouching at his door? It was the sin of pride. He was saying, “I can make it on my own, I don't need to come God's way. My way is just as good.” Pride led to hatred and murder.

Perhaps an old hymn best expresses how we must approach God:

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my heart revived,
And now I live in Him.*

The key phrase is “stoop down.” You cannot receive living water unless you are willing to stoop down, to humble yourself and admit you do not have it yourself. There is no other hope, no other way. You have to admit that you cannot save yourself.

A THIRD reason the gospel arouses opposition is because...

3. THE GOSPEL FORGIVES BLATANT SINNERS

The Gospel forgives blatant sinners who richly deserve death and hell in the eyes of the world. I remember one day, when I was in the prison ministry, trying to explain the gospel to one of the social workers. He said, “You mean to tell me that one of these inmates in here, who has lived a bad life—perhaps committed murder, or armed robbery or rape—can simply trust in Jesus Christ as his savior and be forgiven and go to heaven; while I could live a good life, be a good father and a good husband and good provider for my family all my life and then end up going to hell, just because I did not accept Jesus Christ!” I said, “That’s right, because the Bible teaches that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. None of us are righteous in God’s sight. The only way to be reconciled to God is through Jesus Christ. All your goodness won’t get you to heaven.” He went away very angry and upset. Thankfully, the Lord was working on him, because several years later I learned that he eventually did trust Christ and became a wonderful Christian.

The gospel arouses opposition because it forgives blatant sinners who richly deserve death and hell. But that is the glory of the gospel. God can save the chief of sinners, because salvation is by grace.

CONCLUSION

God sometimes takes very severe measures to wake people up to their situation before “the wrath of God comes upon them at last.” Paul knew what was coming for the Jews of his generation who had rejected Christ. Before long the Roman soldiers would lay siege to Jerusalem and break down its walls and destroy the temple. Many thousands of Jews would be slaughtered and the nation would be scattered to the ends of the earth. God patiently waits for us to turn from our sin. But if we do not, there comes a time when He forces us to live with the consequences.

That is happening in our world today. Many people today are trying to live in disobedience to God’s Word. Instead of finding the liberty and freedom they were promised, what we have instead is increasing social disintegration. The most important message of the Bible is that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and that, in receiving Him as personal savior we become children of God. Have you just listened to God’s Word, or have you acted on it, welcomed Jesus Christ into your life and experienced personally His transforming power?

