

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **A People to Be Sad For**

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16

Code: 52-8

Our text this morning is taken from 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, returning again to verses 13 through 16. I'd like to begin by reading this text to you as you listen carefully to set the Word of God in your mind that you might respond as it is explained to you.

Beginning in verse 13 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. "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. 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 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God but hostile to all men, 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."

There is a very vivid contrast, as is apparent after just that reading of Scripture, a contrast between the believing church at Thessalonica and the unbelieving Jews who persecuted the church. As we noted last time, the people at Thessalonica had believed with limited opportunity. The Jews had rejected in unbelief with unlimited opportunity. For the people in Thessalonica there was but a very brief hearing of the gospel for a few weeks from the Apostle Paul and his co-workers, Silas and Timothy. But for the Jews, historically there had been centuries of exposure to the revelation and the goodness of God. So here you have then a people to be glad for and a people to be sad for. A people who responded to their limited opportunity and faith, a people who responded to their unlimited opportunity in unbelief.

And so, as the Apostle Paul continues to reflect and to write of his joy and encouragement because of the true and rich spiritual character and progress of the Thessalonian church, he is also reminded of the contrast of the tragic spiritual disaster of his people, the Jews. First he thanks God for a people to be glad for, and then he moves to a people to be sad for.

Recalling what we learned last week in verses 13 and 14, Paul says how thankful he is to God for the Thessalonian church and he really says there is a three-fold reason. First of all, their reception of the Word, notice verse 13. "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." The first cause for his thanksgiving was their reception of the Word. They received it as

God's Word. They received it as divine truth and they were transformed by it.

Secondly, he is grateful to God for their honor of the saints. Notice in verse 14, "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus." Back in chapter 1 verse 6 he says, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord." They had given the highest form of honor, that is imitation. They had imitated the other saints, they had imitated the apostles, they had imitated the Lord in their living. And Paul is grateful for them not only of their reception of the Word, but their honor of the saints. They were following the pattern of godly people.

Thirdly, the Apostle Paul is glad for them because of their perseverance in suffering. At the end of verse 14 he says, "You also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as those in Judea did from the Jews." They had shown the genuineness of their faith by their reception of the Word, their imitation of the saints and their perseverance in suffering. They were a people to be glad for. They received and obeyed the Word. They honored and imitated the example of spiritual leaders. And they endured the trials and the tests and the suffering pursuing that eternal glory. A people to be glad for.

And all of a sudden in a very shocking way Paul turns this 180 degrees the other direction. And he mentions at the end of verse 14 the Jews. And it's almost as if the mention of that group of people catapults him into the despairing thoughts of verses 15 and 16.

You say, "Was there something that triggered this?" We don't know the mind of Paul. Obviously the Spirit of God inspired this. But I don't think there would have had to be any specific thing to trigger such a response or such an immediate shift in thought, such a stark contrast. You see, the Apostle Paul had had a running conflict with the Jews. It was non-stop, it was endless, it was persistent.

If you go back, for example, to the time of his conversion, you have to go back to Acts 9. Acts chapter 9 starts out with him persecuting Christians, ends up with him preaching Christ. He starts out as one who is taking the life of those whom he believes are heretics attacking the true Judaistic faith. He's converted to Christ and by the time you come to verse 20 of chapter 9, he has embarked already upon his ministry. He preaches now that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. And then he gets into a debate with the Jews and it says the Jews were confounded. What it means is they were defeated in the debate and it was public.

Embarrassed, they became enraged so that they finally sought to murder him. It says they tried to kill him, but he escaped. In the very same chapter in which his conversion is recorded, the first murder attempt is also recorded on his life. It doesn't change. When you come in to chapter 13, the Apostle Paul is dispatched to preach from the church at Antioch, go into the world and carry the gospel. And when the Jews who see him effectively moving to accomplish his goal, see the whole population of pagans ready to listen, they react negatively. It isn't an intellectual rejection. It is more a prejudicial

rejection. They are filled with envy and jealousy and rage because they will not be a part, nor will they tolerate any Jew being a part of something that involves unclean Gentiles. And so in Acts 13 from verse 40 clear through the end, verse 50, you see that kind of reaction.

You come in to chapter 14, the Jews are disobedient to God's Word therefore they incite the mob to assault and stone Paul as a blasphemer. They agitate the crowds against him to put him to death, to kill him.

You come in to chapter 17, nothing changes...envy, jealousy, hostility again is the issue. The Jews get to the point where they go into the marketplace and they hire some local thugs, some dissipated character to start a riot against those who preach the gospel.

You come in to chapter 19 verses 8 to 10 and the Jews there refuse to hear. They refuse to believe. They curse Christianity openly, publicly before the crowd.

In chapter 20 when Paul comes into Greece, he sits in Gaius' house in Corinth with Tertius, his secretary, dictating Romans in the midst of Jewish persecution. And even as he wrote this epistle, he is feeling Jewish hatred. Thessalonica was a place of hostility. When he was there ministering to these people to bring them the gospel, the Jews set against him.

Chapter 21, you find the Apostle moving back toward Jerusalem. Some Jews from Asia Minor, no doubt, present in Jerusalem for Pentecost accused Paul of being anti-law, anti-temple, anti-Semitic, anti-worship. So the mob drags Paul out and starts to beat him to death. They kick him. They punch him. His life is rescued. And it goes that way to the end of the book of Acts. It was a non-stop conflict between the Apostle and the Jews.

So, when Paul came to Thessalonica, it was no different there. They had conflict with Jewish opponents there. The opposition was constant. He says in 2 Corinthians 11:24, "Five times the Jews have given me 39 lashes." Five times they whipped him 39 blows. He was in a severe and life-threatening conflict with them all the time, including stoning him to death.

Just mentioning then the Jews here would trigger all of this conflict in his mind. And knowing that their hostile attitude hadn't changed or been altered at all, he then cannot resist the prompting of the Spirit of God to make a strong statement about the condition of the Jews before God. God's chosen people all through the centuries still are people of promise. God has yet to unfold a plan for them. But at this time, they had reached an apex of apostasy of unbelief and hostility to God's will. And all of this in the face of incredible privilege.

Look with me at Romans chapter 9 for a moment. In Romans chapter 9 and verse 4 Paul says regarding them, "...Who are Israelites," that names goes back to Genesis 32:28 where it was given to

Jacob after he wrestled with an angel. It signifies the name of God's own chosen people. They were the chosen people to whom belongs the adoption as sons. That is a national, not a personal, election to national grace, to national privilege. To them also belonged the glory, the presence of God, the Shekinah. God dwelt in their midst, led them, lived in their tabernacle and their temple. To them belonged the covenants, the special pledges God made to them. They were recipients of redemptive revelation, the covenants, including the New Covenant which was first given to them. They were those who received the giving of the law, the Mosaic morality, the source of blessing and prosperity. They were given the service, that is the order and instruction of worship in the temple, how to approach God. They were given the promises, best seen and fulfilled in Messianic hopes, glorious destiny, eternal inheritance.

Verse 5 says they were given the fathers, the distinguished leaders, the special instruments of God who fathered that nation and then he says, "From whom is the Christ according to the flesh who is over all, God bless forever, amen." They were given the Messiah, the King, the Savior, the Lord of lords.

Jesus summed it up by saying, "Salvation is of the Jews." Immense incalculable privilege and opportunity through the centuries. And yet they rebelled. And so, here in this text of 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul fixes his attention on that rebellion and endeavors to show the contrast between a people to be glad for and a people to be sad for, the contrast between a people who believed with limited opportunity and the people who rejected with unlimited opportunity.

Now I want to say something by way of a footnote. We're talking about the Jews of the time of Christ and the time of Paul, not all Jews of all time. And we must remember that even the Jews of Paul's time and Jesus' time were beloved by both Paul and Jesus. It was Jesus who was bearing their hatred on the cross who said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." It was Stephen who was feeling the crush of the stones they were throwing on his head who said, "Lay not this sin to their charge." And it was Paul who had a lifelong, as it were, conflict with them who said, "I'm telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and heaviness, unceasing grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He loved them so much and so longed for their salvation he says I could wish myself to lose my salvation if it would gain their's.

The only proper attitude toward the Jews who killed Christ, the Jews who killed the prophets, the Jews who pursued and endeavored to kill the Apostles is the attitude of Christ who sought to forgive them, of Stephen who sought that God should not hold this sin against them, of Paul who grieved so deeply he could have wished to give up his own salvation for their's. There should be the very heart of compassion toward these unbelieving people.

Listen to the words of our dear Lord Himself in Luke 19. Verse 41 says, "He saw the city and wept over it." Jesus weeping. This is what He said through His tears, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace, but now they have been hidden from your eyes." Jesus weeping over the Jewish people saying if you had only known the peace that was available to you. And then He says, "It's too late, for the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you and surround you and hem you in on every side and will level you to the ground and your children within you and they will not leave in you one stone upon another because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation." You didn't know when God came to you. You didn't know when peace was offered to you. Because of that you're going to be destroyed. And He was talking about the destruction soon to come in 70 A.D. when the Gentiles came and took Jerusalem and killed a million one of the Jews and then went on a rampage through 985 towns of Judea slaughtering Jewish people.

The judgment of God fell and it broke the heart of Christ like it broke the heart of God, like it broke the heart of Stephen, like it broke the heart of Paul. And they cared, did Paul and Stephen, because Christ cared, because God cared. The only proper attitude is heartbreaking grief over the perishing state of the people of God in unbelief. And yet Paul must speak of their true condition.

By the time of Christ and Paul they had reached the apex of their apostasy. It wasn't the beginning of their rebellion, it was, in a real sense, the end of it. They rebelled against God's Word and God's salvation in the wilderness as soon as they had left Egypt, started worshiping an idol resulting in thousands of them being killed. And a whole generation never entering the promised land. They rebelled against Moses led by Korah and hundreds of them were executed. They rebelled against the truth of God and were bitten by poisonous snakes. Repeatedly they exhibited a disinterest in God, a disregard for His Word, a disenchantment with His holy purpose, a discontent with His will and disdain for the true worship of His name. No sooner were they in the promised land then they were seduced into idolatry. God gave them promises of blessing or cursing in Deuteronomy 28 and tragically they chose the curses. They gave themselves to the worship of Baal and other gods. The whole story is one long tragedy as they continually turned away from God, ultimately ended up captive to pagans. And even after they came back to their land, it was never like God wanted it and by the time Christ came, they were apostate hypocrites.

Now through all of this tragic history there was always a remnant of true believing redeemed Jews. there was always that tenth that God promised Isaiah would be there, that remnant. But the nation as a whole turned its back on spiritual privilege. Paul says of them in Romans 10, "They have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge and their problem is they don't know God's righteousness and they seek to establish their own." They turned from the righteousness of God to a works' system where they thought they could be righteous enough to earn their own salvation. So by the time of Christ the leaders are apostate purveyors of a manmade system of self-righteousness, a manmade

system of works and they have led the people away from salvation. John the Baptist comes into the picture and he calls the people back to righteousness. He preached righteousness. Some followed him, most did not. The majority remained in sin and when the Messiah came, they killed Him. That's how apostate they were. The One they had been waiting for, the promised One to fulfill all their hopes and expectations was utterly unrecognizable to them because they did not understand the true standard of righteousness. And so they killed Him.

And Jesus said this in Matthew 21:31 and 32, "Truly I say to you, that the tax gatherers and the harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you," and He's talking to the religious leaders. Tax gatherers were the social scum, Jews who had bought tax franchises from the Romans to make money on taxation of their own people. And then the harlots, they were the moral scum, street walkers. And Jesus says those people will get into My Kingdom before you will, "For John came to you...John the Baptist...in the way of righteousness and you didn't believe him." See, they were ignorant of the righteousness of God, so when God preached the righteousness of God they didn't believe him. They were in to self-righteousness. "But the tax gatherers and the harlots did believe him and you seeing this didn't even feel remorse afterwards so as to believe him. Did you never read in the Scripture," He further says, "the stone which the builders rejected became the chief cornerstone? This came about from the Lord and it is marvelous in our eyes, therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and be given to a people producing the fruit of it." And He said, "I'm going to turn from you as Jews and I'm going to call out a new people, the church," the church. Sad tragic story of Israel's unbelief.

Jesus said in the Sermon, against the spiritual leaders of Israel, Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate." Except for a small remnant, the Jews had become a people to be sad for, a cursed, apostate people. While, on the other hand, the new people of God, the church, was replacing them.

You remember in Matthew 22, Jesus said, "The king prepared a feast for his son and he went to the people who had been pre-invited," namely Israel, "and said, 'It's time now, come,' and they wouldn't come. So he went out into the highways and byways and collected anybody he could collect that would come." And what that parable of Matthew 22 is saying is when the Jews said no to the Messiah, God turned to the world and pulled out a new people.

You say, "Is that all there is for Israel?" No, Romans 11 says some day in the future all Israel will be saved. God will not be unfaithful to His original promise. God must keep His Word. Zechariah said, "There's a time yet in the future when Israel will look on Him whom they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son and Israel will be saved." But that only after severe trials. Then and now, the Jews are a people to be sad for.

Yesterday I stood and talked with a Jewish man, really a lovely man. And I said to him, "You're Jewish, what do you believe?" He said, "I'm just Jewish by birth, it doesn't go any further than that. I don't...I don't believe in the religious part."

I said, "Do you realize the privilege you have of being Jewish?" I personally wish that I could be so privileged. "You," and I took him to Romans 9, "You have all that God could give, the covenants, the promises, the glory," and I went through that whole list. "But," I said, "it all culminates in the Messiah."

He said, "Yeah," he said, "my son has become a Christian and he believes that."

And I said, "And he is a true Jew in the fullest sense because a true Jew is one who comes to Jesus Christ as his Messiah and everything else falls into perfect place."

He said to me, he said, "Well, I don't know about that but I know he has found peace."

I encouraged him that that peace was available to him, as well.

And isn't it wonderful that even with the apostasy of Israel reaching the point where they killed the Messiah, where they having killed the prophets of old, continue to do all they could to murder the Apostles still fit into God's redemptive plan? And He still calls Jews in this age to salvation in Jesus Christ and I praise Him for those in our church family from Israel who believe in their Messiah. And some day He will call that nation to Himself.

For the Jews at the time of Paul and Jesus, and even today, for the most part, are a people to be sad for because they had the greatest spiritual privilege and opportunity and they are lost without their Messiah and damned to hell. The Jews had started the fires of persecution with the killing of Jesus. They had then continued the fires of persecution everywhere Paul went, rejecting Christ, rejecting the churches, spreading the fact that Christianity was not true. And Paul sees them in contrast to this church in Thessalonica.

Look at the three contrasting characteristics. Number one, their rejection of the Word. The Thessalonians received the Word, the Jews rejected the Word. Notice verse 15, "Who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out."

You say, "What does that have to do with the Word of God?" It had everything to do with the Word of God because all of those are simply the folks who were proclaiming it. The Lord Jesus came to speak the truth. The prophets had preached the Word of God. The Apostles were proclaiming the gospel. They killed Jesus, killed the prophets, drove the Apostles out not because they didn't like their personalities, but because they rejected their message. They would not receive the Word no

matter who brought it. The noblest of men had brought it through their history, namely the prophets, the men of spiritual virtue, the men of God. They killed them. Then came Jesus Christ Himself, perfect, flawless, without sin who literally banished disease from Palestine in the time of His life and blessed everyone who came near. They killed Him, too. And now they were pursuing all the rest of those who preached the gospel, to kill them as well. No matter who brought it, they rejected it. They rejected it at such an extreme level that they had to assassinate those who preached it.

Jesus puts this into a parable in Matthew 21. Turn there for a moment, look at verse 33. Jesus speaking to the religious leaders in the temple gives them a parable, it goes like this, Matthew 21:33, "There was a land owner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and rented it out to vine growers and went on a journey." Very simple picture. A man puts together a vineyard. And then he rents it out, leases it out to some people to manage it for him. "When the harvest time approached he sent his slaves to the vine growers to receive his produce and the vine growers took his slaves, beat one, killed another, stoned a third. He sent another group of slaves larger than the first and they did the same thing to them. Afterwards he sent his son to them saying, 'They will respect my son.' When the vine growers saw the son they said among themselves, 'This is the heir to come, let's kill him, seize his inheritance.' They took him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine growers?"

What an unthinkable story. Here's a man who puts a vineyard together, leases it out to some tenant farmers. When he sends his servant to collect the produce, they murder them. He sends another group and they murder them. Says I'll send my son, they'll be good to him. They kill his son. What do you think he's going to do to those people? Look how the Jewish leaders acted, look how they're responding. Verse 41, "They said to him, 'He'll bring those wretches to a wretched end and will rent out the vineyard to other vine growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper season.'" And then Jesus applies it. "You've got it right, He'll punish those wretches and He'll give His vineyard to somebody else."

There it is. He is going to punish you apostate Jews and he's going to give his vineyard to the church, to a new people. That is the sad, pathetic, tragic indictment of Israel from the mouth of the Lord and confirmed in the mouth of their own apostate leaders. In chapter 23 Jesus speaking continuously now to the same religious leaders, verse 31, He says, "Consequently you bear witness against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets, you have the same spirit of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of guilt of your fathers, you serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore behold, I'm sending you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barachias, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar," he was a priest. "Truly I



say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation."

He says you're just like your fathers. They murdered the prophets and now you're going to murder all the preachers that I send. They filled up their guilt to the brim and when it overflowed God judged them, and you're filling up your guilt to the brim and when it overflows God will judge you as well. Tragic, tragic indictment. And the indictment is crystal clear in 1 Thessalonians, look at it.

Paul says, showing their rejection of the Word, "Who both killed the Lord Jesus..." If anyone asks who killed the Lord Jesus, it's very clear, the Jews mentioned in verse 14 killed the Lord Jesus. The Romans executed Jesus but it was a Jewish plan and a Jewish plot. "We have no king but Caesar," they said in John 19, "crucify Him." They wanted him dead. It wasn't all the Jews of all time that killed Him, it was those apostate unbelieving Jewish leaders who incited the unbelieving Jewish mob of that time and that place in history who did that. You cannot hold all Jews responsible for that. But I'll tell you this, you can hold all people on the face of the earth responsible for refusing to believe in Jesus Christ, for that is a sin to be punished by an eternal hell. But in that case a Jew is no more guilty than a Gentile, any unbeliever is guilty. But these Jews in that place and that time reflective of the apostasy, the ascending apostasy of their history killed the Lord of glory, the crowning sin of the human race. The strong vehement statement that Paul makes here is in harmony with the mind of God.

They did the unthinkable. In fact, Peter says, "Men of Israel, you nailed to a cross Jesus," Acts 2:22 and 23. You put Him there. And yet it isn't surprising, verse 15 again, "You both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets." This is a pattern. This isn't anything new. You've always rejected the truth of God. In Acts 7, you remember, Stephen preaching, at the end of his sermon he says in verse 51, "You men who are stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit and you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the righteous one whose betrayers and murderers you have now become."

He says to the Jews in Jerusalem, you're His betrayers, you're His murderers. There's no debate about who killed Jesus Christ in the Scripture. The apostate, unbelieving, Jewish leaders of that time incited the mob of unbelieving Jews to kill Jesus. But it's old stuff because they always killed the messengers of God. In 1 Kings 19 verse 10, just to give you an Old Testament text, "And he said," this is Elijah, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword and I alone am left and they seek my life." Elijah, that marvelous prophet, they wanted him dead like all the rest of the prophets.

The actual murders of the prophets are not recorded specifically in the Old Testament. Hebrews chapter 11 says they sawed them in half. Apparently Isaiah was one who was sawn in half during the

reign of Manasseh. They literally cut him in half. Jeremiah was stoned to death by his fellow Jews. Why? Because they rejected the Word. And now he says, thirdly, verse 15, "And drove us out." And the verb conveys the idea of a hunting something down, like an animal, you're hunting for the kill. They hunt us down with the intention to persecute. and he's not just talking about the incident at Thessalonica, though they did that there, but everywhere.

There's such a sad, sad people. The law of God, the promises of God, the covenants of God, they had it all. They refused it. Go back with me for a moment to Deuteronomy 28. and here is where the foundation as laid for this whole thing. Deuteronomy 28:1, God says to them way back in the very beginning, in the Pentateuch, "Now it shall be if you will diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth and all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you will obey the Lord your God." Verse 15, "But it shall come about that if you will not obey the Lord your God to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you." There it is, blessing/cursing, they chose cursing because they chose disobedience. They hated to hear the truth.

There are some Jews like that today. Many Jews. In fact, in Jerusalem today and in Palestine in Israel, it is very difficult to preach the gospel. There's tremendous hostility. But today there are also many Gentiles who are equally hostile to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who refuse to hear the Word, Jew or Gentile, are a people who bring sadness to the heart.

Second point, not only their rejection of the Word but their hindrance to the saints. The Thessalonians had honored the saints, they hindered the saints. Go back again to verse 15. "They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved."

On the one hand the Thessalonians were imitating the Apostles. On the other hand, the Jews were hindering the Apostles, trying to prevent them from preaching the gospel. This is an amazing indictment. He says the Jews are not pleasing to God. Now that is an understatement. Why such a...such a basic understatement?

Well, because this is precisely what they claim...we are pleasing to God...would be their claim. We are pleasing to God. And what Paul says...they are not pleasing to God. Simply turns the words around in their own mouth. They were more than just not pleasing, they were hostile to all men and to God. There was a basic hostility there. Tacitus, the Roman historian, writes, "Toward every people they feel only hate and enmity." They had a hostility in them, but it most directly and primarily was directed at hindering the Apostles from preaching the gospel to the Gentiles so they could be saved. It wasn't that they were racially prejudiced, that's not Paul's point. They were religiously prejudiced. They didn't want the gospel which they resented being preached to anyone. Hostile to

God's purposes. Hostile to everybody, says Paul. And it shows up because they tried to keep everybody in their sins by not letting the gospel be preached to them, although they didn't realize that was the implication. They're hostile to all men, not that they hated all men, but that they prevent us from giving them the gospel. They're interfering with gospel preaching. Boy, that is a dangerous thing...a dangerous thing.

The end of Jesus' speech to the disciples in Matthew 10, He says, "If you receive a prophet, you will receive a prophet's reward. If you receive a righteous man, you will receive a righteous man's reward." You better be careful how you treat the spokesman for God. But these were interfering with gospel preaching.

What happened in Acts chapter 4? No sooner did they start to preach than the Sanhedrin pulls them in and says, "We command you not to preach." They go out and preach, chapter 5. They pull them in again, verse 40, make whips and beat them bloody and raw. Send them back out and tell them not to preach again. It was always that way. They attempted to silence the gospel preachers. Kill the prophets, kill the Son of God, persecute the Apostles, stone them to death, do everything to keep them from preaching. That's how strongly they rejected the truth and how hostile they were toward the saints who lived that truth.

Then there was a third reason why they were a people to be sad for, their punishment in suffering. The Thessalonians had had perseverance in suffering and came through triumphant. Their's is not something in which you can persevere, it is a fatal, deadly punishment. Verse 16, "With the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins, but wrath has come upon them to the utmost." That's a frightening text.

This construction shows result and/or purpose. The result of their hostility, the purpose of their hostility is that they are filling up the measure of their sins. Literally it says they always heap up their sins to the limit. This point says as it did in Matthew 23:32 to a very well defined point at which you've reached your limit. You remember back in the Antediluvian culture when God said, "My Spirit will not always...what?...strive with men." There comes a point at which you filled it up. Your fathers always fill it up, Jesus said Matthew 23:32, and here Paul says, "And you always fill it up." You always run your sin to the absolute limit, and once the cup begins to overflow, judgment is inevitable. So he says, "Wrath has come upon them to the utmost." They had reached the apex.

The apostasy of Israel had gone all the way to killing Christ and killing the messengers of Christ. That's it. That language, by the way, comes from Genesis 15:16 where it says, "The iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full." That's the first time we hear that kind of phrase. It means that God doesn't act in judgment until iniquity has reached a certain point...and then He acts. He says here the Jews were ahead of the pagan Amorites. They always fill it up. And when the cup is full, judgment is inevitable.

Notice the verb there, "wrath has come." Has come, already arrived, has come...this use of the aorist tense, I believe, affirms something that is so inevitable and so certain that it can be spoken of as if it has already come to pass. First of all, he could be referring to the tremendous sweeping devastation and massacre of 70 A.D. But more than that, he's talking about a final eschatological wrath when they face the God whom they have rejected as individuals. The kind of sin they're committing here is the kind of sin that is not just associated with a military defeat, it's associated with an eternal damnation. It's reminiscent of John 3:36. Do you remember this verse where Jesus says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who doesn't obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God...what?...abides on him,"? It's already there waiting until the moment of release.

So, what is Paul saying? All the prerequisites for future eternal damnation have been met. The cup is full. You have come to the limit of your sin, murdering the Messiah, murdering His preachers. There will come a temporal judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem. There will come an eternal judgment to you as individuals in the destruction, the unending destruction of hell.

That phrase at the end of verse 16, "wrath has come upon them to the utmost," eistelos, it means He loved them to the limit. He loved them to the extreme limit, to the very end, to the perfect expression of love. Same phrase. He will damn them to the limit, to the fullest expression of judgment. And he's saying the judgment is now irreversible, the cup is full, the judgment cannot be avoided.

So it was with a people to be sad for. You say, "What's the application today?" The application today is we need to be thankful for those who believe and receive the Word and honor the saints by imitating their lives and those who persevere in trials, showing their hope and faith that perseveres to eternal glory, but we need to be sad for those who reject the Word, those who hinder the preaching of the gospel, those whose only ultimate suffering will be that of hell. We have to have a heart of compassion. One writer says this, "Paul is writing here about particular Jews, those who have shown hostility to God's messengers and not about the Jews in general. Further, what Paul says about them is valid only so long as they persist in their hostility to God and the gospel. If this view is correct, Paul is not guilty of anti-semitism. What he says here about the nearness of God's wrath is true for those Jews who persist in ungodliness, but does not contradict the hope that he holds out in Romans that the present time of Jewish opposition to the gospel will be followed by a turning of the people to God."

And, beloved, we should be zealous to show the love of Christ to Jews and lead them to the knowledge of their Messiah. We should desire to do the same thing for Gentiles. The choice is the same. Will you be a person who receives the Word? That's salvation. Who imitates the saints? That's sanctification. Who perseveres to the end? That's glorification. Or will you be a person who rejects the Word? Who hinders the saints and the work they set out to do? And who will endure only punishment? That's condemnation. The choice has always been the same...blessing/cursing...never different. Let's bow in prayer.

So provocative, Lord, to hear the Word this morning, to understand it, to grasp profound yet clear truth that every person faces a choice, to be a person to be glad for or a person to be sad for. Each person this day has had opportunity and privilege to hear of Christ and His saving work and we can only pray that they, like the Thessalonians, will receive the Word, imitate the saints, persevere to glory, not reject the Word, hinder the saints, and know only punishment. Father, work Your work in every heart and may everyone in the hearing of this message be one for whom we can give You thanks for they have embraced the truth which is in Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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