

There's probably only a few of us in this room, who can remember the days **before** the internet. (Put up your hand).

These were the days where if you wanted information,

- you'd have to listen to the news on the wireless /watch/read the newspaper; or
- ask someone who knows stuff; or
- maybe a travelling salesman might have sold your family a set of encyclopedias;
- you'd go to a Library and look up the reference section...

There was a couple of times I was wanting some information, and I couldn't get it locally, so I waited until the next time I was in Brisbane, and I caught the bus into the State Library and looked it up there...

But then along came the internet. It was the mid 1990's when dial-up ISP's started to become available in country areas. (sound of dialup) And if you had a really good service, you could have download speeds of up to 56kbps... To put that into perspective, at that speed, a 4K movie would take over a month to download...

Anyway, when the internet first came along, it was billed as "The information super-highway"... But let me tell you: in the early days, that was an over-statement. A few Government departments had a little bit of information available, and a few large corporations had a webpage that would tell you how wonderful they were... And that was about it...

But over the next 30 years, the amount of information published on the internet, for me, is unfathomable... On my phone, I have instant access to more information than what all of the books in the State Library contains...

So, we are now a generation who have **unprecedented** access to information.

But the crazy thing is, while we have access to all of this information,, we have become a generation, who have no idea, what is true...

*e.g.*  
*When I was a lad, a boy knew he was a boy;*  
*A girl knew she was a girl...*  
Now??? Apparently not...

*Medically, we knew “fluoride was good for our teeth”. Now there’s people trying to tell me that it’s a government conspiracy to stop me from breeding...*

*And I **used** to know who a thief was – he was the bloke holding a knife (in a dark alley) and demanding my wallet... Now it’s most likely the lawyer of a Nigerian Prince who’s been trying to track me down as his heir...*

How do we know what is true, when we live in an era of “fake news”. And who determines which news is “fake”?

How do we know what’s true, when in this age of information, apparently “My truth” can be different to “your truth”.

And when we go **searching** for information, the search engines know that I want to be affirmed in what I already believe, and so they return the results that I want to hear. In the meantime, the search engines know that you want to be affirmed in what **you** believe, and so they will return to you, the results that you want to hear.

And so, there's a place for "fact-checkers", right??? But the problem is, when it comes to online "fact-checkers", **one** fact-checker will say "this is the truth"; and **another** will say that it's a whole load of nonsense...

Who is the fact-checker on the fact-checkers??? What a crazy world we live in...

Even in Christian circles, there are so many different ideas/teachings/denominations and branches of the church... How do we know what is true???

And particularly when we start doing our spiritual research online,,, I can get into my own little echo-chamber, and surround myself with voices and opinions that reflect my own beliefs... And no matter what it is, all I gotta do, is Google what I want to hear, and I will be flooded with a myriad of voices that all affirm me in my version of the truth (no matter how crazy it is).... **Or**, I may be given the most popular version of the truth (which may or may not be true).

How can we know what is true??? Well, some don't want to know. Some like it, just as it is, because we get to believe what we want to believe...

But, you know what:

It seems to me, there are more and more people, who have had enough of the lies/"opaque greyness".... And what we now crave is the black-&-white, honest-to-God truth... — There is an **increasing** hunger for solid truth.

When Jesus stood before Governor Pilate, He said:

John 18:37-38 (ESV)

<sup>37</sup> ..... For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

And he walked away from the One, Who is the very source of truth... What a missed opportunity...

What is the truth?

I'll tell you what **is** true:

What has **always** been true – and what will always **be** true,, is the Word of God...

Isaiah 40:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

That's what's true.

And the Word of God is a firm foundation – it gives stability. Do you remember the story Jesus told – the wise man built his house upon the rock; The foolish man built his house upon the sand. And once the flood came up, the sand: It's not stable when there's water running about... And the house fell.

And Jesus' whole point is:

Those who hear the Word of God **and do it**, are the wise who build their house upon the rock. And the key word there is "**and do it**". The wise **hear** the Word of God; the foolish **also** hear the Word of God; but it's only the wise who **do** it...

Righto, enough of the introduction. Let's get into Thessalonians:

Paul has been giving thanks for this fledgling church. He was only with them for about 3 weeks, but Paul says of that time:

V<sup>13</sup> 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.

When you and I read the Scriptures, do **we** accept it as it really is – the Word of God? Or do we have the opinion somehow, that it's been polluted by the word of man???

You see, when it comes to the Bible, there **are** many, who are of the opinion that it's the writings of men. They claim that it's something that was used (in an era gone by), to control the masses who didn't know any better. And is still being used today, to control those who are weak-willed and of weak mind... In their arrogance, they would say "If you believe the Bible, you're an idiot..."

But even amongst Christians, when **we** read the Scriptures, do we accept it as it really is? If it is the Word of God, it means something?

This is God, Who is:

- speaking to you;
- telling you, He loves you;
- encouraging you into what is good; and
- warning you from that which is evil...

Every time we read the Word of God, this is what it is: God speaking.

As a pastor, one of the things that people most often ask me about, is "How can I hear from God?" And I've gotta say (without a doubt):

"Reading God's Word, is the primary way, we hear God"....

Do you read the Bible?

"Yeah, I read it."

OK, What is God telling you in His Word?

Sometimes they know. Sometimes they don't.

And then my next question is "Are you doing everything that He says?"

And **always**, the answer has been "No".

So, why do I need God to speak to me in a different way, if He's already speaking to me clearly in His Word, and I'm not doing what He says...

The Word of God is not only to be heard. It is to be obeyed. The wise man, is the one who hears the Word of God, and does it.

But sometimes, as we read the Word of God, we put it through a filter (to strain out the bits we don't like, or that maybe offend/challenge me). If the Word of God, truly is the Word of God, and not the word of man, then it is **not** something to be strained/filtered. It is something to be cherished and applied in all of its challenging and confronting fullness...

*Someone once sent me something to read, and he said "I'd like to know your thoughts on this" .... And it was quite lengthy,,, and weird (off the internet) (but I knew they were fully convinced by it)... And I said: "Just give me time to digest it, and I'll prepare a response from the Scriptures."*

Because you know what: He was asking for "my thoughts". But **my** thoughts, are worth nothing... Word of God, however – there's real value in the Word of God...

*And so I wrote a response, and pointed him to:*

- *what the Bible says about what he was wanting to know; and*
- *how the article he'd found on the internet, does not line up with the Scriptures; and*

- *how it was twisting scriptures,  
to make a case for something the Bible does not teach...*

*His response: “Yeah, thanks, but I see it differently.”*

As I said before, my “thoughts” are worth very little. But the Word of God – I can’t argue with the Word of God. It’s worth everything.

**But** the Word of God only has value to me, if I receive it for what it really is. It is **not** the word of men. It is the Word of **God**. And in a world where truth is not defined, the Word of God stands and remains as the first and last beacon and bastion of truth.

There’s a well-known verse in **Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> 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.

Wow...

The Word of God is not merely a receptacle of information, and it’s **not** just something we learn about. The Word of God is living/active/life-changing... The Word of God **does stuff**. And you know this. You’ve experienced the Word of God in action, in your own life...



If you want to hear about the Word of God in action, ask another person during smoko, “Can you tell me how the Word of God has done stuff in your life?”

And for the Thessalonians, the Word of God was **at work** in them... BTW, that is a sign of a true believer – the Word of God, at work **in** the believer. If I claim to be a Christian, but the Word of God is not at work in me, then there’s something dreadfully wrong (in my walk with God).

So, how did Paul see the Word of God at work, in the Thessalonians? I’m going to sum it up, with “Steadfastness of faith”... He saw the same steadfastness of faith in them, as what he saw in the early church in Jerusalem.

And they **needed** the same sort of steadfastness of faith, because just as the Christians were persecuted in Judea, the Thessalonians in Macedonia were being persecuted in pretty-much the same way...

- In the Jewish territory of Judea, they suffered at the hands of their countrymen (the Jews);
- In the Gentile territory of Macedonia, they suffered at the hands of **their** countrymen (the Gentiles)

They all had it in for Christians...

And we shouldn’t be surprised by this. Even God’s chosen people of Israel, were pretty-much being true to form. ... To their shame, they had a very long (and often repeated) history, of opposing God.

- They killed Jesus for a start; but

- years earlier, they killed the Prophets;  
and

- they drove the Christians out of the land.  
Paul himself, used to be one of those who did that. He used to believe he was doing God a service by hunting Christians down and putting them in prison and overseeing their execution.

That is, until Jesus got ahold of him...

But here's the indictment: They....displease God and oppose all mankind <sup>16</sup> by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved

The greatest service than a person can provide, is to introduce another person, to Jesus... How? By proclaiming/speaking the word of Jesus, to those who are not yet saved...

Now, when it comes to **hindering/stifling** the Word of God – when it comes to actively placing a barrier, to the Word of God being proclaimed in a locality, this **displeases** God, immensely.

I don't know if you caught-on in the reading, just how **much** it displeases God... He says: **so as always to fill up the measure of their sins.**

That's like saying, "To top-it-all-off, it got this bad."

- They killed Jesus;

- They killed the Prophets;
- and to top it all off – **to fill up the measure of their sins**, they will not let us speak the word by which mankind can be saved....

And get this: At this point, he's **not** talking about the heathens. At this point, he's talking about God's own people...

And the pinnacle of **their** sin:

- wasn't killing Jesus (that was God's plan. It had to happen); and
- it wasn't their own rejection of Jesus (they will be judged for that)...

The pinnacle of their sin, was hindering the proclamation of the Word of God.

They thought they were doing God a service by “shutting them down”... Not so... They were hindering the Word of God (by which we are saved) from being proclaimed....

And **we** have to be careful **we** never do that...

**I** have to be careful **I** never do that...

May we **never** hinder another, from proclaiming the Gospel...  
To do so, (without a doubt), **displeases** God.

Can I decide, **not** to preach the Gospel, if offence may be caused if I do??? **Never**...

And at this point, Paul reminds us of the Day of Judgment...

In V16, he says **But wrath has come upon them at last!**

I don't know what he means by that... Was there something that happened in Judea that was the wrath of God? I think it's too early for it to be the fall of Jerusalem that happened in 70AD and I think this letter was written somewhere around 50AD...

But it seems he's saying, "The judgment of God is so sure, let's talk about it as if it's already happened." It's **going** to happen... And on the Day of Judgment, those who hinder the Gospel from being preached, will experience the wrath of God...

**But** the wrath of God: that ain't a problem for the Thessalonians... When the Word of God was proclaimed to them, they received it for what it was: The Word of God.

The Word of God is **not** something:

- to be trifled with;
- to be filtered or strained for the bits we don't like;
- to be ignored...

The Word of God is something:

- to be received;
- to be believed;
- that works within us;

And it has the power.

It has power:

- to save;
- to transform;

- to renew;
- to change your life.

The Word of God, is something of eternal certainty...

As we saw last week, the Thessalonian church came under severe persecution (because of their faith in Jesus)... Why did they stand firm in their faith? It is because they were convinced, that it was the Word of God, and not the word of men...

The Word of God, is something of eternal certainty... The word of man... Who would die for that???? But the Word of God — Too right....

So, be encouraged. Receive the Word of God for what it really is: Not the word of men, but the Word of God by which we are saved.

And stand firm in certainty of faith.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,  
we thank You for Your Word.  
We thank You for those who proclaim Your Word.  
- for those who spoke the word,  
that **we** might hear,  
that **we** might believe.

Lord, we pray,  
that as the Word of God is proclaimed,  
that those who hear it,  
would receive it for what it is.

– that **we** would receive it for what it is;

- a word of power;
- a word of authority;
- a word of truth;
- as something that cannot be disputed;
- and is never, ever fake.

Lord, let us be genuine in how we handle Your word.  
That we would not seek to  
shape it to fit our own worldly desires,  
But that we would let Your Word shape us,  
to become the Godly people  
You desire us to be.

Lord, in this world where truth is "unsure";  
and where falseness has a very loud voice,  
Help us to delight in;  
and to proclaim,  
Your word of eternal truth.

And Lord, forgive us,  
for when we have stifled Your word.  
May we never prevent your word

from being proclaimed,  
(no matter what the cost)  
for it is the word by which those who hear it,  
can be saved.

in Jesus' Name,  
Amen.