



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
April 19, 2020

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-20

Series: Real Christians in Challenging Times

I miss seeing you face to face. But our hearts are still connected and I value that connection that we enjoy together. We're allowing the word of God to work inside of us, we're sharing the gospel with other people during these difficult times, and our connection with each other is important. Now those words I just said to you are words that come from my heart to you. But those are the same.... That's a summary of our passage today. It was so remarkable, when I looked at the passage and I saw Paul saying these same things to the Thessalonians, I was just shocked. Let me just say that again to you. He says I miss seeing you face to face, but our hearts are still connected. We're allowing God's word to work inside of us. We're sharing the gospel in these difficult times and our connection with each other is important to us. Wow.

By the time you're done today, I want you to see the power that God's church has. Certainly the power we have with the gospel inside of our lives is strategic, but what takes place as the church is miraculous. God does something in our work together that is really powerful. I believe that as you see this, you're going to experience something that will help you significantly in your walk with the Lord.

We're studying in 1 Thessalonians. We chose this study well before the virus hit and we had to do social distancing. The books were already purchased and ready to be distributed on Sunday morning. But as this whole problem came about then we started doing the study from home. But it's a very important study and today we're going to see Paul talking about three resources that the church provides that strengthens its power so that it can do a deeper work in the lives of people. I think you'll find it encouraging.

Let's go to the passage today that is in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20. Let me read this passage to you. It says – *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!*

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or

crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

The Thessalonians were away from Paul, quite a distance. They're in northern Greece. Paul was essentially kicked out of the city. He moved down to southern Greece and he's sharing in the city of Corinth and his heart is torn. He's feeling sad. He's feeling the longing of not being with the people he loves, the Christians that he enjoyed fellowship with. He's feeling like he's missing them face to face, and as he does he's just recounting how much he cares for them and longs for them. I'm sure there are people you long to be with that you can't be with right now. You can feel the pain that Paul was feeling at this moment.

So what I want to do is look at this passage. I want to take it apart, but I want to start with that verse 17 because it's the apex of the passage. Verse 17 is the one that talks about him caring for them and longing to be with them. I can feel the pain that Paul is experiencing in this moment as he's talking to them and sharing with them. Let's look at this passage. In fact let's take this verse 17. It says – *We were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart.* I want to look at those *torn away* and *not in heart*.

Let me throw those words up the screen at the top so you can see the Bible verses that's there. Let's look at the word *torn away from you* for a moment because that's the feeling, the pain that Paul is experiencing. When Paul says he's torn away, he's using the word that describes bereavement or being orphaned. That's what the word means. I just feel like I'm torn away from the ones that I love. The pain that he's experiencing from the social distancing of the world where he was. He was quite a distance away and he didn't get information from them, he didn't know what was going on in their lives. That's why he sent the letter after he got the report back from Timothy that they're doing great. So Paul is so excited to tell them I am just so connected to you. He uses a word to describe this connection. He uses the word *heart*. Do you see that in the passage? He uses the word *heart* to say we're not face to face, we're not in person, but we are connected in our hearts.

I would suggest that one of the resources that we have in our relationships or in our connectedness as the church is that is this relational connectedness. The church has this relational connectedness and why? It's because it touches our hearts. So what I want to do is look at some things that exist in the hearts of every person that draws them to the church as God designed it, and this church then provides this resource to meet those needs deep inside of a person's heart. And connection is one of those things. We long to be connected. And we miss that when we can't come together.

That's why more people I think are signing on to Calvary Chapel Living Hope at 9:45. Yeah we're not going to start our study till five minutes after 10, but do you see how many people joined this at 9:45? Do you know why you all joined in? Because you want to be connected and you want to hear the stories. I want to tell them and I'm eager to hear the stories of what's going on in your lives. So send me pictures. I'll share them next week. Let's be connected in that regard.

The same thing is true on Sunday mornings when we do meet. People come at 9:45. Why? So they can be connected. It's part of this connected need that we have that God provides us through the church. We're finding now during this time of social distancing that we have more people in small groups than we've had before. Why is that? Because people want to be connected and small groups are a great way to connect, especially if you can just login from your home to be a part of a small group that's going on. The Care liaisons are connecting with people and calling them. I encourage you to share with them what's going on because that connectedness is strategic for you and for us as we're being connected together.

I would suggest that when the early church was just forming I want you to see this idea of the heart connected because it's in the heart that you connect with family members. It's in your heart that you connect with others. I remember the story in the Old Testament of Jonathan whose armor-bearer said to him, "Boss, do whatever you want to do. I'm connected with you in my heart." And what he's saying is I'm connected; we are together in this.

Let me show you the verse that illustrates what happened in the early church. It says – *And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul (that's how they were connected), and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them.*

What the passage is talking about is the connectedness that we see in that early church. We're seeing that the people understood more about who God was, what He was doing. As they did, they could picture God and understand this connectedness that took place. It was happening inside their hearts. You can't stop that with social distancing. We are still a connected church. We are still sharing our hearts. It might take a little bit more work, but it's powerful what takes place when we do that and we appreciate the connectedness that takes place inside our hearts.

Let me show you some statistics. 3.5 billion people are connected to the internet. That's a lot of people. Over 2 billion active monthly Facebook users. But a Harris poll (and this was before the whole social distancing thing came about) says that 72% people feel lonely. The fact is that God has given the church the power of connection. And that power is strategic. That's part of who we are. You can be proud of the fact that you're part of a church because God has given you something very strategic and you can use that in your own personal life to be connected. That connection is so important. You see, when you connect in God's church you learn more about God. That's because part of our job and our connection is to point each other toward God. That we're encouraging each other, we're stimulating each other's faith, we're getting to know God better. That's one of the benefits of connection.

Another thing that connection does is it helps us to get to know ourselves better. When you become vulnerable with people and you share with them, "Hey would you pray for me when this is going on, or I'm struggling in this area..." When we do that as a connected body of believers, then it helps God shine the light into the dark places of our lives so that we can find healing in those places. Connection isn't just about warm fuzzies or eating bagels and drinking coffee.

Connection is about a depth of relationship that reaches into our very hearts and that's what the passage talks about. The heart is where we're connected.

But another thing happens when we connect with each other and that connection is that we experience the reality that we are not alone. We are not isolated. God rescues us out of that darkness of isolation because we have the connectedness that we enjoy together. It is a privilege to be a part of God's church and to be connected in the midst of that is strategic. Take advantage of the power that comes from the church that God has established. It's one of the resources that's provided to us by God through His church that He's designed.

Let's go on in the passage. I want to take you now back to the beginning verse in our passage, verse 13. Because it talks about the power of God's word. So one of the resources we have as the church is connectedness. A second resource we have is God's word and it truly is God's word. Notice it says there – *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.*

Let me take that and put that on the top of the page and I want to look at some of the words there. You can take those words and put them into your notebook. I want to start with that word *received*. There are two words there: *received* and *accepted*. You might take those and mark those in your booklet as you probably already marked the word *heart* earlier. But mark this word *accepted* or *received*. It's two different Greek words, but I want you to understand what that word *received* means. Because when you understand it then I think you'll be able to receive the word of God in a better way.

When the angel came to Joseph in a dream when he was going to divorce his wife Mary because she was pregnant, the Bible tells us that the angel said that you can receive her as your wife. You can welcome her as your wife. That's the same word there that's being used in the passage.

But here's my favorite use of the word. Because Jesus took the little child, the Bible says, and put the child in the midst and then He said, "Everybody take a look at this child." I imagine He put him on a big rock or something. He said, Take a look at this child. What I want you to do is I want you to know this about the kingdom. That in order for you to enter the kingdom of God you have to become like this little child. That means with innocent faith you need to trust in something outside of yourself, like a child does so." And He says this: "*Whoever welcomes one of these children welcomes me.*" That word *welcome* is the same word used in our passage today when it says that *when you received the word of God you accepted it not as the word of men but what it really is, the word of God.* We welcome God's word into our lives. We study it and we look at it.

Why? Notice those words: *which is at work in you believers*. Circle those words. Draw a line over to the side and jot down the word energy or the word *energeo* is the Greek word there. And that word is a word that describes work. That God energizes us through His word. If you're finding yourself discouraged, if you're finding yourself frustrated, you need the energy that's produced by God's word because what it does is this word does a work inside of our lives. And that's a powerful work. He's generating that energy that we need to live.

If you just take a look at God's word each morning and use that passage to energize you in the course of the day, that will do some great things for you. It will help you. But God is also working inside of your heart in a way that's helping you to become something different. He's molding your character, changing your heart. It's just powerful to see that God's word is at work. It's one of those resources that's provided by God for us that we experience certainly when we come together as a church, when we study God's word. But you can experience that on your own.

Do you see when we look at the scriptures we see in the passage that in 2 Timothy 3:16 it tells us that – *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for four things*. This is what God's word will do for you to energize you. One: *teaching*. Two: *reproof* or rebuke, which we need sometimes. Three: *correction*. That would be putting you on the right course. And fourthly: *training in righteousness*. We need all of those things. Why? *So that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*.

The goal here is to recognize that God is at work in us. He's doing something powerful in our lives. We need to understand that the reality here is that God has designed His church to be this network that not only provides connection on a heart level, but provides an opportunity for us to experience Him greatly. In fact God has given the church the Bible, a vehicle for change. You can use it in your home. You can use it in your personal life. God wants to do something powerful in us and He uses God's word to do that.

So the first thing is that the resource that God gives is the connectedness that we experience because we're part of God's church and what He's done. The second thing is that we have God's word and we can understand God's word in a powerful way. And then thirdly let's go to this other part of the passage.

Now you'll see in this passage that Paul takes this little tangent about how bad these people are who... Back up in verse 14 he says – *You suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews*. So what was going on in Jerusalem when they were suffering at the hands of the Jewish leaders, now the Thessalonians are suffering because of political leadership and the people of their own country. So there's this commonness they're experiencing. But he's reflecting back on the bad people *who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind from doing what though? By hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved*.

You see one of the things that God has given to us as the church is He's given us the ability to share the gospel with other people. In fact let me take you to the next page on my slides here that what God is doing here is He's given us this other resource. This resource to share the gospel with others. Why? So that they can be saved. That's what He wants from us. He wants us to be able to understand what that looks like in practical terms and we can do that as we share the gospel with people today.

Now let's talk about sharing the gospel and what that means because here's what I think happens. I've experienced this. I'm sure you have too. I share the gospel with someone and when

I'm done they say, "Okay, well that's fine for you, but I'm happy the way I am." Or they'll say, "I understand the gospel fulfills you, but I'm fulfilled the way I am right now." Now how do you respond to that? I mean you could (I wouldn't recommend this), but you could say, "You are not happy. You are not fulfilled." But the reality is that they are happy. It's because of God's grace they're happy. That's the reality. It's just amazing that God's grace falls down on the righteous and the wicked, the Bible says. Rain comes on the righteous, rain comes on the wicked. It's God's grace. The sun shines on both people who are doing the right thing and those who are doing the wrong thing. That's the common grace of God. And it's by God's grace that a person can experience being happy in life, in the midst of all the brokenness that goes on.

But instead of approaching this by saying you're not happy, you're not fulfilled, I think we need to acknowledge that they are happy, they are fulfilled. At least to the way that they understand that. I think we need to go deeper here. If we're sharing the gospel, we need to help people understand three truths. In fact the misunderstanding of these three things prevent people from understanding the gospel. And if we can help them understand these then they won't be making this statement: I feel happy just the way I am, or at least they'll know what the gospel is really about.

The first problem, the first misunderstanding I think that people experience is this misunderstanding of sin. It's been said that in order to understand the gospel or the good news, you have to understand the bad news. Billy Graham is the one who said, "In order to help someone get saved, you first have to help them get lost, or you have to help them understand that they're lost so they can get saved." You see, there's a sin problem that we have in our world. We would all like it, we'd all be happy if there was a cure found for the virus. But imagine if you were dying because of the virus and a cure was found, you'd be very happy because you know that the cure deals with something very specific in yourself. We have a problem in our lives. The gospel isn't designed to make us feel a little more happy. We don't receive the gospel in our lives in order to become a little more kind or become a nicer person or to be a little bit more loving. The gospel has a purpose. And that purpose is to rescue us from something that's killing us. If you misunderstand sin then you miss this.

You have to understand that sin is corrupting you and it's killing you and you will die. It has to do with eternity, but it even has to do with now. It's just corrupting you. Sin is a definite problem that we all experience, and that's why Jesus Christ died for us in a virus-free body, perfect body. Jesus Christ died on the cross for us so that we would be saved from sin. When you understand the depth of sin's destructiveness, then you know that you need a Savior. So the first misunderstanding that people experience has to do with this idea of a misunderstanding of sin.

This second misunderstanding is this one that has to do with a misunderstanding of purpose in life. Did you know that God wants our world to be perfect. Heaven is a perfect place. No crying. No death. It's the light of God that's there and only perfect people get there. God also is perfect and He wants to have a personal relationship with only perfect people. Only perfect people can have a relationship with Him. And that's impossible for any of us because we all have sin. You can't just evaluate whether I have more good than bad; it's about sin that's inside of your heart. When that sin is there you are not perfect, you cannot have a relationship with God. So our purpose in life is to be connected to God and be on this path toward being in heaven and you

cannot have that under your own strength. That's why Jesus Christ died on the cross. And His perfect is what allows us to have a personal relationship with God and allows us to get into heaven. You need that perfection that God has designed. And it's not just about being good enough. God is not just trying to help us reach a certain level that it's okay. He wants our purpose in life to be focused on that perfection.

The third misunderstanding that people have is the misunderstanding of how goals work. If you were to say to me, "Do you need a phone?" Well the answer to that question depends on my goals. If my goal is to just live and be happy, no, I don't need a phone. But if my goal is to communicate with someone on the other side of town, then I do need a phone. You need the gospel if you realize you have a problem with sin and you realize that there's imperfection weighting you and you need Jesus Christ to do that, now you have a need. You recognize the need for the gospel. You don't need the gospel to make you happy right now. You need the gospel to heal the problem of sin that exists in your life that's preventing you from getting to know the perfect God in a personal way.

You see, understanding the gospel is so powerful. When people misunderstand it then all kinds of negative things happen in their life. They need to be able to understand who God is, what God wants to do in their lives, and understanding that is very important for them.

I read this dialogue and I'm going to read it to you. This is a discussion between a Christian and his friend using the ideas I just shared with you. Listen to this dialogue about how this works.

Christian says, "Well so that's the gospel. Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins and He rose from the dead to conquer death.

Friend says, "Hmm. I think I get what you're saying, but I don't think it's for me."

"What do you mean by saying it's not for you?"

"Well I guess I just don't need it. I live a pretty good life right now. I feel fulfilled and happy."

"Sorry for another question, but I'm curious by what you mean when you say you don't need the gospel."

"What do you mean?"

"What do you think the gospel is for?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well you said you don't need the gospel. What do you not need it for. When we say I don't need that, we usually mean we can accomplish some goal without extra help. So what is it that you don't need the gospel for?"

"Well like I said, I don't need it to be happy."

"Oh. Well I actually agree with you, at least to an extent. You don't necessarily need the gospel to feel happy, but you need the gospel to feel perfect and be welcomed into the kingdom of God."

"Why would I need to be perfect? I really think that's pushing it a little bit. We all make mistakes. It's human to err."

"Actually I don't think so. According to Jesus in the Bible, God's ultimate plan is for the entire world to be perfect. I mean just look at the war, violence, and mistreatment all over the world. Do you think God's just cool with all of this?"

"Probably not. But that raises another question. Why doesn't God end all the evil in the world?"

“God is going to end all the evil in the world and there are two ways He can do that. The first option is just destroy or remove all evil in the world. As you and I have made clear, that means He would remove us. The second option is for God to remove the sin from the human hearts through the gospel.”

“So you’re saying that God has to either remove us or remove our sin?”

“Yes! That is why the gospel is so important. Jesus took our sin and gives us His own perfection.”

“And why is this necessary?”

“Because God’s ultimate plan for the world is to perfect and have it to be free from sin with no death, no sin, no hatred, but a perfect world of love and worship and gratitude.”

“I think it’s starting to make sense. Can you put this all together?”

“God wants a perfect world. That’s the goal. However, we are imperfect. In fact you and I, through our sin, make God’s perfect world imperfect. So if God is going to perfect this world because of our sin He either needs to eliminate us or perfect us. If you choose to embrace the hope of the gospel He can perfect you today through what Jesus did in His death and resurrection. So in very simple terms, there’s good news, there’s bad news, and more good news. The good news is God has a perfect plan for this world. The bad news is, our sin keeps us from enjoying that perfect plan for the world. The further good news is this: Through the gospel we can be brought back into God’s perfect plan for the world.”

Oh wow. I just think that the misunderstanding of the gospel causes us to miss something very important that God wants us to understand. So what we do is we share the gospel with other people. Why do we do that? Because the gospel means that God has rescued us from sin. That is one of the resources that God provides for us as the church that we have this message that we can share with others. It’s a powerful message that we want other people to understand.

We could leave this passage right here, and if you’ve gained what you need from the passage you can stop. But I want you to see one more thing in the passage. So go with me to this next slide and let’s look at the last part of this passage in verse 18. It says – *We wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.*

Satan is a lot of things. He’s a liar, he’s accuser, he’s a tempter. The Bible says a lot of things. But one of the things he does is he’s a hinderer and he hinders us from experiencing what we need in our lives. So what happens in our lives is that roadblocks get in the way and Satan wants to put those roadblocks in our way to prevent us from being whatever we might be. God wants to empower us. He wants us to be part of a church. He’s given us these three resources to be the church that God has called us to be and to be a light to other people. Satan wants to put roadblocks in the way continually. They will never destroy the church because Jesus has made a promise to us. And that promise is this. That promise is in Matthew 16:18. He says – *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* This is God’s church. It’s His church that He is nurturing and growing and you can’t destroy that church.

Imagine that Satan and all his lieutenants get together and they say, “We’re going to destroy the church. Here’s how we’re going to do it. We’re going to use political unrest. We’re going to shut down every church on every corner that exists everywhere.” So they go to work and through public policy, through persecution, Christians are not allowed to go to church by threat of being

killed. That's just not happened in history, it's happening in our world now today. Satan's plan is to try to hinder and to stop the church from being the church.

But as time progresses and the church continues on, we learn something very important. You cannot stop God's church. It continues to grow, it continues to develop. It's the committed people that add more and do the extra work to connect, to be there. They do the extra work to figure out how to use technology in our case. Many of you have overcome those barriers to be part of the connectedness of Calvary Chapel Living Hope. But even in those areas where people are being killed for their faith, it's those who are learning about commitment to Jesus Christ that are gathering together.

So in our imaginary story about Satan (who is real) and his lieutenants, they get together ten years later and they're saying, "Wow. Look at that. All the churches are empty." But Satan says, "No guys. We've got to open up the churches again. Let them get together and pray as they will. Because I realize that we may have closed every church on every corner, but we opened up the church in every home." And that's the reality of God's church. It's powerful. It changes people. It cannot be hindered by people. I cannot be hindered by anything. Nothing stops it.

Paul realizes that as he's going back to the people in Thessalonica. He's telling them, "Guys, my heart is with you. I'm so grateful for the ability we have to connect together. I'm grateful for God's word and the way that it's changing you. I'm grateful for the gospel that we share, and nothing can stand in the way of that." Satan tries to hinder it, but he can't hinder it because it is the church...the church that will never be destroyed. It's a privilege for us to be a part of it.

I trust that if God has spoken to your heart today, that you will enjoy being part of God's church. Yes, it will take a little bit more work. It's just part of our commitment to being what God wants us to be. And if you are not yet a believer, a Christ-follower, I want to encourage you to make that commitment, to trust the Christ as your Lord and as your Savior. As you do, you're going to want to find a church like ours. Fellowship with us. Let's enjoy the Lord together. Let's grow and serve. Let's connect. It's one of the supreme benefits of being part of the family of God and knowing Jesus Christ in your life is the church that He's created for us.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you very much for my brothers and sisters, and I pray for each one of them here today. I ask, Lord, that you would inspire them and encourage them. I pray that you would provide connecting opportunities for them. I pray that you'd help us to overcome the challenges of our own hearts. Not just the challenges of the virus that we're experiencing outside, but the challenges of the anger, or the challenges of torn relationships, or the challenges of anxiety or fear that are going on inside. We ask, Lord, that you would heal us. That you would teach us what it means to trust you. You would use the connectedness of your church to being about your glory and your power. We thank you for what you're doing. We ask for your grace on your church on the individuals represented in it. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.