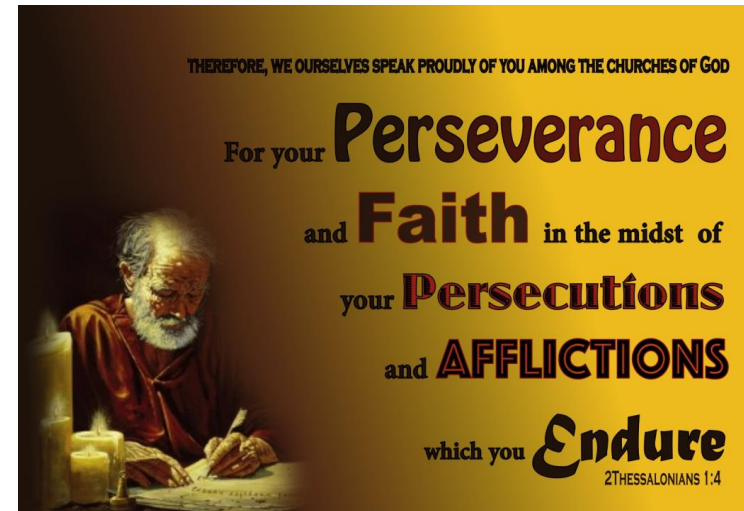


Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

2 Thessalonians



Sunday 18th October – Saturday 17th October

Introduction

Thessalonica was an important city commanding the road between Rome and Byzantium and had a fine port. Paul preached there for three weeks (acts 17:2) before being driven out. The church here was entirely Gentile and 1 Thessalonians might be Paul's earliest letter - maybe the earliest of all the Christian writings. As new Christians, with a limited initial input from Paul the believers needed some instruction on how to live - especially as they started to reject aspects of their culture. The letters are concerned with the Last Things - 1 Thessalonians reassuring that those who have already died won't be disadvantaged when Christ returns and 2 Thessalonians teaching that this return won't be immediate. Whilst scholars agree that 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul, there is debate over 2 Thessalonians - some even thinking that it was written first as it covers many of the same themes.

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Sunday 18th October Psalm 19

The Rev'd David Coaker serves with Grays URC in Essex.

The stars declare his glory;
the vault of heaven springs
mute witness of the Master's hand
in all created things,
and through the silences of space
their soundless music sings.

2: The dawn returns in splendour,
the heavens burn and blaze,
the rising sun renews the race
that measures all our days,
and writes in fire across the skies
God's majesty and praise.

3: So shine the Lord's
commandments
to make the simple wise;
more sweet than honey to the taste,
more rich than any prize,
a law of love within our hearts,
a light before our eyes.

4: So order too this life of mine,
direct it all my days;
the meditations of my heart
be innocence and praise,
my Rock, and my redeeming Lord,
in all my words and ways.

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that the phrase I used is a Midlands name for this meat.

Paul is explaining that he will always write in this style when writing to the Thessalonians so they know the letters are genuine and that they can depend on the contents of them to steer them true in the faith. The words & phrases we use matter, they can create connection or disconnection between God and ourselves and God and others. God offers us peace, but we have to take it, God offers connection, but we have to accept it.

Paul's writing is not always comfortable, and there are many that wrestle with some of the things he is attributed with saying, but like all of Scripture, the message flowing through is one of truth and love.

Prayer:

Intimate God, we know your voice deep in our heart, but often ignore or bury it, help us reconnect to that recognisable song that guides and guards us through life. Amen

Prayer

Lord, help us to be willing to work to make our own living, and feed our families. Help us to support those who are unable to work due to circumstances they can't control. Not just financial support emotional support too. And Lord, help us to graciously accept that sometimes we too need support. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen

[Saturday 24th October 2 Thessalonians - Final Words](#)

Kirsty-Ann Mabbott, Church Related Community Worker, St Columba's and Ansty Road URC's Coventry

2 Thessalonians 3: 16 - 18

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

Reflection

There is very little written about these last three verses, but as I sat here pondering, the phrase that kept standing out was "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write."

The words and phrases we use, often tell the story of where we have come from and where we have travelled. I originally grew up in Birmingham but have lived in many places and travelled a little and I often forget that sometimes the words and phrases I use don't compute in other places. I was on the phone to a friend the other night we were talking about what we had for dinner, I said "I had belly draft with rice and veg" and my friend replied "what on earth is belly draft?" and I'll be honest I was stumped because it what I had always called it. My friend googled it and exclaimed "oh, you mean belly pork!" we then discovered

You can hear v1 here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-I6gX9UtP8>

Reflection

Spirit of God, present within the beat of our hearts, the pulse of our neighbour, and within all of life – but we still lift our eyes to acknowledge your presence.

The bluest of skies, the darkest of nights, the stampede of clouds and the glitter of stars – all speak of glory, of the splendour of Creation in its infinite and finite expressions.

As we orbit the sun, and the moon runs its course, events uncountable occur. Lessons are learned and forgotten, relationships born and broken, changes made and resisted, yet there is no single voice, or a unified account. But still, if we could but hear it, a chorus made up of billions of sounds blast forth from our tiny corner of the universe.

Within the spark of Creation, the laws were set, the constants determined, and through the ages our understanding has, and continues, to develop, deepen and dilate. From rejoicing with the dawn, to placing ourselves at the centre, to seeing that we are but one orbiting planet in a galaxy, to whatever we discover in the future; in faith, in trust, we name God, within, around and beyond all that is.

In all that speaks of perfection, wisdom, simplicity, justice, clarity, purity, eternity, and truth; in faith, in trust, we name God, within, around and beyond all that is.

In all that enlivens our spirits, heightens our confidence, causes us to rejoice, gives us clarity of vision, makes us awestruck and feel blameless; in faith, in trust, we name God, within, around and beyond all that is. For us to reflect God's glory, is beyond price and the sweetest of rewards.

For us to deflect God's glory, is too often our true nature and we are called to search ourselves, challenge our assumptions, be of humble heart, and place ourselves at the service of God's Kingdom.

Prayer

Let the words we speak, and the thoughts we keep to ourselves, both be acceptable to God. God, Spirit within, ground of our being and our continual Saviour. Amen

Monday 19th October [2 Thessalonians - Encouragement](#)

The Rev'd Sue Henderson, retired minister and member of Bradford on Avon United Church

2 Thessalonians 1: 1 - 4

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

Reflection

Maya Angelou, a black American poet and civil rights activist, wrote: "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Other encouraging words are: "Be kind, be loving, keep smiling." There are times when we don't feel like, but doing it anyway definitely helps. When we have doubts about our ability, it's amazing when someone says, "Of course you can do it."

Reflection

Paul's letters to the Thessalonians offer insight into some misunderstandings that might trouble a community of new Christians. Paul and Silas established the church at Thessalonica just a year or so before writing, and these new Christians were still learning the fundamentals. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus had taken place only about 20 years earlier, so it was all very recent (20 years ago today? That was only the turn of this century!) Perhaps it's not too surprising that there was confusion, including so-called false teachers who peddled fake news about Christianity causing some of the Christians in Thessalonica to give up work. Those Christians lived in idleness, supported by wealthy patrons and Paul was not impressed. Paul expected Christians to earn their own living. He wouldn't tolerate idleness. "If you won't work, you don't eat!"

As I write, we are making our way out of lockdown, and facing an unknown 'new normal'. Lockdown has been a period of intense work for some, and enforced time-off for others. It's meant high anxiety for many, especially those who were furloughed, lost their jobs and consequently lost some or all their income.

Paul is quite clear that he is talking about people who are unwilling to work – very different from those who are unable due to previously unimaginable circumstances.

Whilst he expected to support himself, we know that when he lived in Thessalonica, Paul accepted offerings and support from the Christians in Philippi (Philippians 4: 15-16) and in the first letter to Thessalonians, he urged people to care for each other (1 Thessalonians 5: 14).

Today Paul's approach is as important as ever; we must be willing to work, and as Christians we must support those who are still suffering after Lockdown or other unexpected events, and finally, like Paul, we must graciously accept occasional support for ourselves.

Linda Rayner is a member of Bramhall URC and URC Coordinator for Fresh Expressions

2 Thessalonians 3: 1 - 15

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will go on doing the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers.

Knowing that his words would fill the Thessalonian believers with the humble desire to do better, Paul praised them for their growing faith despite tremendous persecution. He gave thanks for their increasing faith and love in difficult circumstances. The Thessalonians have set an example for us as Christians to follow. Difficult circumstances are not excuses for us to lose faith. On the contrary, they are opportunities for our faith to grow.

The Thessalonians demonstrated patience. They endured in spite of hardships. They took their suffering and used it in positive, creative ways. In doing so, they showed love to each other. Paul also praised the Thessalonians for their abounding love toward each other. Rather than living according to their own self-interest, as suffering people often do, the Thessalonian believers had reached out to one another. Their persevering patience testified to God's power and the reality of their faith---things that Paul could boast about to other churches - meaning that Paul could hold up the Thessalonian believers as good examples.

God's grace and peace allow us to grow in every area of our lives, including our love for others. We can glorify God when we live our lives to our very best, when we do the greatest thing even when the wrong things are happening all around us, and when we can give encouragement to others.

Prayer

God, there have been times of weariness or fear and times when we feel ready to give up, but always at the right time there came a note or a call from someone that you have lovingly placed in our lives. Thank you that you are a God of encouragement, and that we have your Holy Spirit to help and to comfort in times of need. Show us how we can best be an encouragement to others. Amen.

Tuesday 20th October 2 Thessalonians - Punishment of the Wicked

The Rev'd Angela Rigby, Minister at St Johns Hill URC Sevenoaks and Christ Church URC Tonbridge

2 Thessalonians 1: 5 - 12

This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering. For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marvelled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

As a non-scientist, I find seeds amazing. They start covered up by soil, buried as if dead. Yet the longing for sunlight is so strong, that they push through, determined to find the sun.

Humans are not so different. Some days we want to stay hidden underneath our duvets. We sigh, "God, there's just too much suffering, hate, greed, anger, apathy, just too much to do... How long oh LORD?" Yet something or someone draws us up from underneath our duvets. Maybe work? Maybe a loved one? Maybe hunger?

"Just have hope" people might say. "Be more positive." No - I want to

and for many, the Kingdom to come can seem too far off.

The church is facing unprecedented pressures as it seeks to follow the way of Jesus in this world, with all the structures and traditions of another age. Some of these are still of value and give us safe ground to build on, whilst others hold us back and limit our ability to be fleet-of-foot.

These, alongside the personal struggles and joys that we bring with us as we read Paul's letter, can mean that we need his words afresh. 'Keep going!'

Keep encouraging one another.

Keep close to the Good News.

Keep hoping for God's Kingdom and living as if it is now.

Keep going!

And an important aside. Have concern for those that can't; those who have run out of patience trying, who are hurt and bruised by the side of life's road, those that have hurdles and barriers to climb that others do not.

Keep going. And as you do, speak, act and care for those that can't.

Prayer

Abundant God,
we give thanks for those who encourage us and give us hope
and we rejoice that there is strength in you that revives us.

May your Good news continue to give us confidence in the world you desire for us and that you are creating it, in and through us, by your Spirit. Gentle God, give us compassion for those whose purpose and endurance has been tested to the limit; for those who feel they cannot keep going. May we be your hands and feet this day. Amen

[Thursday 22nd October 2 Thessalonians - Persevere](#)

The Rev'd Martin Knight is minister of St Paul's URC, South Croydon and South Croydon United Church (Methodist/URC)

2 Thessalonians 2: 13 - 17

But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Reflection

There will be some reading this reflection who need to hear the words 'keep going!'

Given the experience of these early Christians, it is no surprise that Paul's letters are full of concern and encouragement. He urges them to 'keep going', even in the face of increasing external hostility and internal divisions. He encourages them to come back to the truth; to the gospel and to embrace the future of God's Kingdom.

As I think about it, perhaps it isn't just some of us who need to hear this. As individuals and churches, we face similar issues as those fledgling communities.

The world around us can seem challenging and confusing. 'My truth' can be found in every tweet and post, fear of global issues like climate change and racial injustice can make us want to pull up the drawbridge,

be honest here. When the world does not look like the kingdom community of God that we pray and work towards every day, when the injustice and hate in the world scream louder than the whispers of kindness and mercy, it is difficult to maintain a perspective of hope. Even for Christians - the people who are meant to embody the hope of Christ - hope can be difficult to find or even see sometimes.

In this part of this letter to the Thessalonians, the author is reminding the people what Christian hope looks like – "the righteous judgement of God." That Greek word often translated as righteous, also means just. After all, how could something be right in God's eyes and not just? God's people have longed for the righteous judgement of God all throughout the story of scripture, and here we see that Jesus returning will finally bring that righteous judgment about.

The author doesn't write these words to scare the Thessalonians into submission to God. The author is NOT saying, "Follow God's rules or Jesus is gonna get you with his mighty flaming angels." Rather, the author is saying, "Keep pushing your way through the soil. Keep growing in Christ. God's glory will shine. You will see it."

Prayer

Jesus, help us to see you when we can't.
When our path seems hidden, help us to keep moving towards your justice, righteousness and kindness. Amen

[Wednesday 21st October 2 Thessalonians - The Coming of the Lord](#)
John Ellis is the Synod Area Leader for West Kent and East Sussex and Secretary of Capel United Church

2 Thessalonians 2: 1 - 12

As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered

together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.

The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.

Reflection

This is not the language of most URC sermons. The Elders' Meeting is more likely to be agitated about M&M contributions to central funds than the Second Coming. Our Church Meeting minutes rarely mention Satan.

But try reading the passage again treating "lawless" not as literally meaning breaking Parliament's laws but as meaning a disorderly environment, where the usual rules have stopped applying and the things that give us a secure framework within which to run our lives have been snatched away. Then Paul could be talking about a year dominated by Coronavirus. There is a clear battle to be won, against a virus that

showers death on us. In the midst of the turmoil, we can be "shaken" and "alarmed", even stop gathering round Jesus, but Paul assures us that one battle is not the war and God's ultimate sovereignty remains certain. Possibly Paul was actually thinking of the political turmoil in the Roman Empire around the assassination in AD41 of the horrendous Emperor Caligula, whose treatment of the Jews was especially despicable. So we could also hear in this passage a recognition that sometimes the world suffers leaders with unlimited capacity for self-deception and self-promotion, who imagine they have the wisdom of gods. In fact they create instability that can infect the lives of millions with anxiety and worse. Such leaders will not have the last word either.

Then there are the more subtle empires of thought patterns. Those who are "lawless" by hiding the reality of God through claiming that God does not exist and that to be responsible in education or broadcasting we have to base work on the assumption there is no God. Paul reminds us there is a battle to be fought there just as much as against a virus or an evil empire.

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, how we long for your Kingdom to come.

But while the "mystery of lawlessness" surrounds us:

save us from being engulfed

show us the battles we need to fight

strengthen us for what we are called to do

give us peace about the battles we need to leave to you.

Your Kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

Amen.