

"II THESSALONIANS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: II Thessalonians 1:1-4, 6-7, 10-12; 2:13-15; 3:11-13

Introduction.

The last shall be first.

We have come to the last of Paul's nine letters to churches in the NT. But it is one of his very first. Since II Thessalonians deals with the same issues as his first letter to the Thessalonians, it was probably written soon after the first which would make them Paul's two very earliest writings.

It truly is remarkable that we have these two-thousand-year-old documents so well preserved by the Holy Spirit. There are very few complete and well-preserved documents of any other secular writings from this time in ancient history.

The New Testament is unique among ancient literature. There are over 25,000 surviving ancient copies and fragments of manuscripts. On other ancient literature comes even close.

God is at work here preserving and protecting His Word. This is His gift to His Church. This is the trustworthy, eternally true, unchanging truth of the living God. We should not neglect so great a gift.

Paul is the writer, but the author is the Holy Spirit, which is why we still read it today to our benefit.

Purpose, theme

Apparently Paul's first letter didn't settle all the concerns of their hearts. And there may have been the continued influence of false teachers. Some may have written letters and tried to pass them off as from Paul. Scams are nothing new.

In these three short chapters there are three major themes, the same three found in I Thessalonians.

- Believers are to persevere through suffering until Christ's return.

- Followers of Christ must not be misled by speculations about his coming return.
- Believers are to live responsibly in their daily affairs as they await Christ's return.

First, the need for continued endurance amid persecution receives repeated attention (2 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13–15, 17; 2 Thess. 3:3–5, 13).

Regarding persecution, harassment, unfair or unjust treatment, discrimination Paul urges perseverance. Perseverance grounded in the hope of who God is and what He promises.

II Thessalonians 1:5-9 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 6 God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 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. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.

Believers truly can trust and rest in God's sovereignty. They can truly fear nothing. God is in control. He is sovereign over suffering, over those who suffer and those who inflict the suffering, of the judgment and reward.

Believers can rest in the absolute sovereignty of God when facing any kind of suffering, discrimination, hostility or persecution. He is sovereign over whatever anyone does to us, when, for how long. God is sovereign over all sin, our sin and the sins of others, and of their sins against us.

Suffering is not a sign of God's absence, but evidence that He is preparing His people, making them worthy of His kingdom (1:5). Salvation and justice belong completely to the Lord. God is in absolute control.

Scripture does not teach that vengeance is wrong, but rather that vengeance is God's. Truly believe, God will take care of it. Vengeance, pay back, belongs to Him, leave it in His hands.

If you are a Christian you have nothing to fear. And this freedom from fear extends to enabling us to love our enemies and return good for evil, knowing God is over it all.

Second, regarding the second coming.

Paul's first letter seems to have created further misunderstanding about the second coming, leading some to a false belief that Christ's return had already begun (2 Thess. 2:1–12).

II Thessalonians 2:1-2 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be ***quickly shaken in mind or alarmed***, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

They have been rattled, shaken, alarmed by someone (false teachers/apostles) or something (a letter from someone claiming to be Paul).

Just as trust in the sovereign God gives a confident hope to preserve in persecution, trust in God's sovereign purposes helps keep believers grounded about Christ's return.

II Thessalonians 1:10 When he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

The goal of God and the goal of all of redemptive history, is to marvel at Christ.

Philippians 2:10-11 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Beyond confidence in the purpose of God, we have confidence in the power of God. Any fear about evil and Satan and the end times dissolves in the knowledge of what Jesus will do to Satan and the man of lawlessness, the anti-Christ.

II Thessalonians 2:8, 10 the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ... 10 those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Those who love the truth have nothing to fear. Those who love Jesus have nothing to fear. Jesus by the breath of His mouth will kill and destroy the evil one and all evil.

As Martin Luther wrote, in his great hymn, one little word will kill him. With one little word Jesus created Satan and with one little word He will kill him.

Christ's effortless victory over sin, Satan and evil removes all our fears over cosmic evil and power.

The best defense against the events leading up to the second coming is not inordinate, obsessive interest in it or searching out who, when, where.

All through the ages there have been many misunderstandings and misinterpretations concerning the return of Christ.

Matthew 24:4-5, 23-25 Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.

23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand.

I spoke this morning about people falling for scams. It shouldn't surprise us how quickly and easily people will fall for false messiahs. There have been false teachers and false messiahs and people claiming to be God in every generation.

In our lifetime there has been Sun Myung Moon, Jim Jones, David Kersch.

More recently a Russian named Sergei Torop (Vissarion) is a self-proclaimed reincarnation of Jesus, and founder of the Church of the Last Testament. Just this last year this 'Jesus of Siberia' cult leader sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Álvaro Thais is a Brazilian astrologer, better known as Inri Cristo who claims to be the reincarnation of Jesus, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He has followers.

There are at least a half dozen more, one in Japan, Australia, England and South Africa.

The best defense against the events leading up to the second coming is not inordinate, obsessive interest in it or searching out who, when, where.

Rather we should be like the disciples in the upper room, “Lord, is it I?” search out every manifestation in our own hearts, of sin, unbelief, neglect, and casting that out and confessing Jesus as Lord and Christ, not in word only, but in word and deed.

Both these letters are a benefit to us who have become complacent in our thinking about Christ’s return. So we need this instruction to wake us up about eternal realities. Jonathan Edwards used to talk about our need to have eternity pressed into our eyes.

Let us “awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand” (Rom. 13:11–12).

Everything we say and do, everything we believe, has eternal significance. And that leads us to the third theme of Paul’s letter.

Third, regarding slothfulness, laziness, not working.

The problem with idleness in the community, needed further attention and required a firmer reprimand (2 Thess. 3:6–12).

This was a result of thinking Jesus had already come.

Paul says keep watching and keep working. Are we to watch? Yes, we are to watch. But while we watch, we must also work. Waiting doesn’t mean idleness, sloth or passivity.

Remember the analogy of the three workers who were asked what they were doing.

One said I am laying brick. The second said I am building a wall. The third said I am raising up a steeple for the glory of God.

Do you do your work with a sense of God-appointedness, that this is your assigned duty in God’s redemptive purposes on earth? Have the big picture in mind, working with a purpose.

Everything we do was significance, purpose, meaning. Do you do your work as unto the Lord?

Colossians 3:22-24 Bondservants [employees], obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work

heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Live a God-honoring, industrious life. Don't be a lazy Christian and bring shame on the name of Christ. Be salt and light in the world.

Do your best work to the best of your ability, with all your might as for the Lord. Be the best employee your employer has. Be the best employer your employees have.

In your retirement serve the Lord and His people, pray for those around you. This is your work. Your work is a divine calling, God has put you here and now.

The sovereignty of God over suffering, over the second coming and over your salvation.

Paul had no doubt in the sovereignty of God over our salvation. As a result he has the assurance of his salvation and he gives us the assurance of our salvation.

He never forgot getting knocked off his horse and blinded by the glory of the revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul knew it was God who called men to salvation and not men who decided to follow God.

II Thessalonians 2:13-14 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God sovereignly chooses us.

We are chosen by God completely apart from any merit, effort or work of our own. God takes the initiative to love and to choose those who would belong to Him.

Paul calls the Thessalonians "brothers loved by the Lord" because God chose them from the beginning to be saved.

This will remain an unchanged reality until they obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus. Saved from eternity to eternity.

God sovereignly calls us.

Having started by taking initiative, God continues to take the initiative into the present. Those whom He chose He now also calls.

Paul's confidence is based on the fact that -

I Thessalonians 5:23-24 ...your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

God sovereignly sanctifies us.

Even our sanctification finds its source and origin in the sovereignty of God.

God will strengthen them in every good word and work.
He will strengthen and protect them from the evil one (3:3).

God is sovereign in the ongoing process of our growth in love and purity. God remains sovereign in all aspects of our salvation. The same sovereignty that saved us will continue to perfect us.

Galatians 3:2-5 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith.

Philippians 1:6 I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Implications and application.

This is a letter to make us trust, pray, and work.

Perseverance proves faith. If you have gone through very tough times and still believe, then your faith is proved to be real. God holds onto us, even as the fires refine us (I Peter 1:6ff).

Don't stop having an expectant waiting, don't just live for now. Hope for the best yet to come.

Don't live like your secular friends and neighbors trying to get all their desires met here and now, thinking this is all there is.

All of Paul's letters begin and end with grace and peace. Grace and peace are from God and they are God's gift to you now while we wait. They are your inheritance, your heritage, your possession because of what the blood of Jesus purchased for us.

Grace and peace to you. Expect it, experience it, exhibit it. Claim it, rest in it.

Grace is God's gift. His mercies are new every morning because Christ died and rose and is coming again to make all things new.

Prayer:

II Thessalonians 1:11-12 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 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.