

The Hope of the Second Coming
Sunday, February 4th, 2024
By Ryan Perry

Scripture

2 Thessalonians 2:13–15

[13] But 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. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Pray

Introduction

If you were here last week, you heard Pastor Dan do a great job of giving us the background of the church at Thessalonica. So I won't go through all of it again, but I will give you some basics.

Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica in Acts 17 and on three Sabbath days they preached in the synagogue. The results of that preaching, according to Acts 17:4 are as follows:

[4] And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

So over roughly three weeks, a church is formed that consists of some Jews, many devout Greeks, and a decent number of wealthy high position holding women.

But soon after that, some of the Jews, who rejected Paul's message formed an angry mob, got the city in an uproar, and tried to attack the house of Jason. They did this because they were jealous of Paul and Silas and hoped to capture and imprison them for preaching their message of Christ crucified.

So then the brothers within the church immediately sent them away to Berea along with Timothy. After preaching in Berea, Paul went to Athens, but sent Timothy back to the Thessalonian church to encourage them and see how they were doing.

Finally, Paul met Timothy in Corinth where he brought with him a report that the Thessalonian church was actually doing pretty well. Despite the afflictions they were facing they were growing in their faith in Christ.

But there were still areas where they were struggling and found themselves in need of Paul's instruction. Areas like: Suffering, Holy living, shirking their responsibility to work, and the second coming.

So Paul writes the letter of 1 Thessalonians and does such a good job of addressing these issues that it seems like a 2nd letter shouldn't be necessary.

Now, we don't know who delivered the letter, maybe Timothy, but we do know that when the messenger returned, Paul found it necessary to write a second letter within a month or so of writing the first one.

The reason is that the Thessalonians had received a fake letter that was supposedly from Paul and his associates telling this young church that the Day of the Lord had already come and they missed it.

So Paul writes what scholars call **the Second Coming epistle** to remind them that they haven't missed it, that Christ is still coming back, and to encourage them to live in light of his coming.

And my hope this morning is to do the same thing. I want to remind us all that Jesus is coming, and that his coming should be an encouragement. It should encourage us to endure in faith, to trust his promises, and to do the work he has given us until the day he returns.

With this goal in mind, I have three points for us this morning. The first one is this:

1. The second coming helps us to endure suffering.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

[3] We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. [4] Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

Illustration:

There was a very short period in my life between 2016-2019 when I decided that it would be a smart idea to become a distance runner. So in my stupidity, I signed up for my first half-marathon and began the long three to four-month process of getting ready for this thing.

Now, I realize that we have a good number of distance runners in our church who love this kind of running, but let me tell you, I did this three times, and every time I was so glad when the race and training were finally over and every time I said the same thing, "I'm never doing that again...." and then I would.

All of that said, in each of these three races, I remember one aspect that has stuck with me ever since. As I was running, there would be these mile markers to tell you what mile you were at, and at each mile marker, there were people cheering you on, holding out water, and telling you how many miles you have left.

This not only helped to boost my energy and replenish my fluids, but it served as a constant reminder to me keep running, because the end was coming.

Text and Main Point:

The Thessalonians are also running a race. The race of faith. And according to Paul they are actually running pretty well. So well in fact, that he, Silas, and Timothy boast about these believers in the other churches of God that they visit.

Because they have not merely believed in Christ, but are continuing to trust and follow Christ even when they are being persecuted. **They are enduring in faith even as they suffer.**

But that doesn't mean everything is perfect. Look with me at Paul's words to them in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10:

*[5] **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] since indeed 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, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, [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.***

You see, on the one hand, the Thessalonians are running the race well even in the face of persecution, affliction, and hardship, but on the other hand, Paul needs to help and encourage them.

He first encourages them by reminding them that their ability to endure this hardship is evidence that God is working in them. **When we face trials and hardship and are able to trust Jesus in the process, that is God's work in us, not our own doing.**

Second, he encourages them by pointing them to the relief and judgment that Christ will bring when he returns. God is going to repay with affliction and eternal destruction those who are persecuting his people and will grant relief to his people who are persecuted, afflicted, and burdened.

Now, I know that many of you have been running the race of faith for a long time, and in your time as a believer, you've gone through some stuff. Maybe it has been persecution from family members, co-workers, or even those whom you thought were friends.

I know some of you have and are dealing with chronic health issues that never seem to get better as you try to endure in faith as your body continually fails you.

And I know that there are those who are fearful about the future of the Christian church in America, as our nation becomes more radically secular and there seems to be a growing hate for the things we stand for and believe in.

If I'm honest, I have dealt with all three of these in different ways and I have at times found myself asking God, **“What are you doing, God? I don't understand why it has to be this way. Can I really trust you and continue to go through this struggle?”**

And God's answer to me and to you this morning is “Yes, You Can!” You can run this race and can endure because the mile markers are winding down, the finish line is coming, and God is bringing his relief and judgment. **Jesus is coming back.**

But this doesn't mean that we merely grit our teeth and endure suffering until we find sweet relief in the arms of Jesus. But instead, like Paul has done in so many of his other letters, he reminds us that God is at work in us even in the race, struggle, persecution, and suffering. As he writes in the 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12:

[11] 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.

Or in

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

[16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...

To put it simply, God is using our hardship to make us worthy of the calling of Christ so that he will be made much of by our life. **He is making us more like Christ through all that suffer and endure in this life. This is from God, and it is for God, as he prepares for us eternal glory.**

So don't lose heart. Continue to endure through all the hard that God has for you because God is making you more like Christ and is preparing you for the day when you will reach the finish line, see him face to face, and your relief will be complete.

2. The second coming helps us to stand firm in the truth.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-6

*[1] 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.** [3] **Let no one deceive you in any way.** For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. [5] **Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?** [6] And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.*

Illustration:

How many of the ladies here own at least one or more pieces of jewelry? And of those of you who own jewelry, how many of you own something that contains a diamond? **Did you know that if you bought that diamond in the past 4 years there is a good chance that your diamond didn't come out of a mine, but instead was created in a lab?**

This is because the lab-grown diamond market has exploded as diamond makers have found ways to make these diamonds almost indistinguishable from real ones and because these diamonds are way cheaper than the ones that were mined.

In fact, the only way to know whether a diamond was synthesized or if it is real is to take it to a gemologist who will test the chemical composition. If it contains nitrogen, it's probably a real diamond, if it doesn't, then it was made in a lab.

So not to alarm you, but you might have or be wearing a fake or synthesized diamond, and not even know it.

Text and Main Point:

In a similar way, the Thessalonians were having a hard time distinguishing between what was genuine and what was fake or made up.

So like I said, Paul has to write to them once again about the second coming. Because, as I said at the beginning, someone has given a letter to this church that is supposedly from Paul and his associates, saying that the Day of the Lord or the Second Coming of Christ, has already happened.

Can you imagine what that did to their faith when they received that letter? This church that was probably less than a year old, working to understand the basic truths of Christianity, and under intense persecution is now told that they missed this thing they are waiting for, Christ's return.

The amount of panic and helplessness must have been immense.

The only close parallel to this in my life was when I was first taught about the idea of the rapture. Now, the rapture in it's basic definition is when we are caught up into the presence of Christ when he returns.

But there are these verses in Luke 17:34-35 where it says that one will be taken and one will be left. And for me as a young believer, I got so worried and kept thinking, "What if Jesus takes others and not me?" and "How will I even know?"

Down and down the rabbit hole I went until I questioned whether or not I was even a follower of Christ in the first place.

So if something like that put me in a panic as a young believer, I can totally understand why the Thessalonians are worried.

This is why Paul so quickly wrote another letter. He understood they were in a panic and he wanted to write to them to say, "Hey, don't believe any letter, word, or so-called spirit that is telling you that Christ has already come back. **That isn't from us so don't be deceived into believing it's true.**

And to make sure that they understood it he goes on to explain in verses 3-11 what needs to happen before Jesus returns.

I'm not going to read you all the verses, but here is a bullet-point list of what Paul says:

Jesus will not return until...

- The rebellion happens. (V. 3)
- The man of lawlessness, the son of destruction is revealed and proclaims himself to be God (antichrist). (V. 3-4)
- The one who is restraining evil and lawlessness is out of the way. (some believe this is the Archangel Michael) (V. 7)
- The lawless one comes by the activity of Satan with power and false signs to deceive the wicked. (V. 9-10)

But then the Lord Jesus will appear. And when he appears, verse 8 says that he will destroy the man of lawlessness by the breath of his mouth and will bring him to nothing.

Here is Paul's main point: Don't worry Thessalonians. There are still things that need to happen before Jesus comes. But when he does come, he is going to destroy the Son of lawlessness and Satan. **Jesus will win when he returns.**

But this isn't anything that this church didn't already know. As Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:5-6:

[5] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? [6] And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.

"Guys, I'm going to tell you these things again, but you already know what is true because I told them to you when I was with you. You know what needs to happen before Christ comes and you know what is currently restraining the evil one so that he can be revealed in God's timing."

One of the things that I love about this church, more than any other church that I have ever been a part of is the fact that we know and love our Bible. Many of you are consistent daily Bible readers and are very familiar with the words and truths that are contained within it.

But as familiar as we are with the Bible, if we are honest, we still struggle at times to believe it and live by it, don't we?

Now, I want to test this. I want each of us to take a moment and look at the following verses and ask ourselves this question: **Do I really believe this?**

Deuteronomy 31:8

[8] It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. **Do not fear or be dismayed.**

Do you struggle with fear and worry? If so, are you struggling to believe that he is with you and for you?

2 Corinthians 12:9

[9] But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Do you boast in your weaknesses because you are so convinced that God’s power shines most brightly when you are weak?

Matthew 6:19–20

[19] “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Do you truly believe that heavenly treasures, which you haven’t seen yet, are better than earthly treasures and comforts? Do you really?

If you are being honest right now and struggling with any of these, my goal isn’t to make you feel like a bad Christian. **I have struggled at times to believe each of the promises laid out in these verses.**

And to make matters worse we live in a world of counterfeits where we are always being fed messages that are contrary to the Word of God.

“Live your best life now. Life is about your success and happiness today. You can be whoever and whatever you want to be. Happiness can be found when we have the right laws and leaders. The right job, home, and relationships are what will satisfy us.”

But one of the realities of scripture that helps us in the moments where we doubt the promises of God or find ourselves wanting to give into the cultural messages is the truth that this life is temporary, but eternity is forever. **There is an eternal kingdom that awaits us and will be fully realized when Christ returns.**

As I said in the first point, there is a finish line that is getting closer with each passing day. And the more that we look to that finish line, the more that we realize it is coming, and the more that we see the prize that will one day be ours with Christ, the more we are able to believe and stand upon his promises for us today.

As Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15:

[14] To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

So don’t lose heart and stand firm upon the promises of God until that day that Christ returns and we all together will receive eternal glory.

3. The second keeps us from being idle.

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11-12

[6] Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

[11] For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

[12] Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Illustration:

I remember after high school that I took a year off from college and worked at a gas station. And I remember that there were a couple of workers who were the absolute worst workers. They would be the ones who very clearly saw the broken jug of milk or the mess at the coffee station or even witnessed a huge gas spill and would just walk right by and act as if nothing happened or it wasn't their responsibility.

However, the moment they saw the boss, they went from looking like a worthless pile to looking like the employee of the month. They were sweeping, moping, cleaning, stocking, and running around at 100 MPH like it was an Olympic sport. Then, on cue, once the boss left, they went back to being the most lazy human beings I had ever seen.

Text and Main Point:

If you were here last week, you will remember that Dan pointed out that the Thessalonian church was dealing with believers who weren't working, but instead were more than likely mooching off of wealthier believers in the church. So then Paul had to call them to action. As it says in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12:

*[9] Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, [10] for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. **But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, [11] and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, [12] so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.***

Paul's point was that they were loving each other well, but needed to grow in the area of work. They needed to make sure that they were working, taking care of their own homes, and not living off of other people so that they would honor God in the sight of non-believers.

Now, there are many theories floating around about why some weren't working. Some believe that it was because the Thessalonians thought that Christ was coming soon so there was no point to work. Others think that people were giving up working to preach the gospel full-time.

So he sets them straight and corrects this in his first letter.

But then they are reading this fake letter telling them that the second coming already happened. What do you think that did to their desire to work?

“Paul has told us to work, keep awake and be ready because Jesus is going to come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2-6). “But now, we are being told that he already came and we missed it?”

“Why should I work so hard when the thing that I’ve been waiting and working for already happened?” And as a result, the problem of idleness and laziness grew in this church.

To be fair to the Thessalonians, if you showed up to work tomorrow and someone told you that your company had been dissolved or that it moved to Mexico, would you keep working anyway? No! Of course not.

And so there were those in this church that were idle, not busy at work, but instead were busybodies and would meddle in the affairs of others.

So Paul, in this second letter, not only has to assure them that they haven’t missed the second coming of Christ, but he also has to remind them, in light of Christ’s eventual return, to endure suffering, stand on truth, **and to keep working.**

And this command is still as relevant today as it was in the first century. Now, I’m not calling anybody in here lazy or idle, but we do seem to live in a society where it feels like people don’t want to work nor do they see the value of work.

And if we are honest, there are times when we all feel this way and we would rather be anywhere but our jobs. **Because the truth is work can feel downright hard, unfruitful, and purposeless.**

And in these moments, we also need reminders as God’s children that our work matters and that it is purposeful.

Reminders like 1 Thessalonians 4:12. The way we work is a witness to outsiders and unbelievers.

Or that the way we live, and work is a confirmation of our faith. As Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-4:

*[1] Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, [2] and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. **For not all have faith.** [3] **But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.** [4] **And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command.***

And finally, we need to be reminded that we are working not merely for the here and now, but to receive an eternal reward and inheritance when Christ returns.

As Paul wrote in Colossians 1:23-24:

[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 hope these truths encourage you this morning. Our Lord, Savior, brother, friend, and master is coming back. We have not and will not miss his coming. But instead, we must wait with a hopeful expectation of the day when we will see him face to face and will be with him forever.

But until that day, remember, we are all running the race of faith, the mile markers are winding down, end is getting nearer. So even though life can be hard and at times feel daunting, remain strong in your faith.

Endure suffering, stand firm in the truth, and work heartily unto the Lord knowing that what awaits you is an eternal reward of glory from your heavenly Father that is far greater than anything this world can give you.

Because what you are seeing and experiencing today is passing away, but the eternal glory of our inheritance is forever. As John writes in 1 John 2:17:

[17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

So endure, trust, and work because today is passing and eternity is coming.

Let's pray.