



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG50: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times **(2/5) Power Of Christ Displayed**

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Home Group Study Notes

22nd May 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

In this passage, Paul (the apostle) talks about expecting the unexpected. Share with your group, what you consider to be, the most unexpected, yet exciting, experience you've had in your life?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1. *“It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere.”* How do you respond to this statement?

2. How important is it that we are able to discern between truth and error? Can you think of an example of where ‘truth and error’ might co-exist in the Christian church today?

3. Do we really live our lives day-today as if Jesus could return at any moment? What effect should the return of Jesus have on the way we live our daily lives?

So what are we to do with this man of lawlessness? In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 we discover that his chief characteristic is to be **lawless**. Which does not mean he has no idea what God’s laws are and so disobeys them in blissful ignorance. No, it means he knows exactly what they are but chooses to invent his own. And this, I think, explains what we read in verse 4, when Paul says, the man of lawlessness *“Will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”* That is, he will take God’s place when it comes to deciding what is right and wrong. He will truly be lawless because he will take the place of the only legitimate spiritual lawgiver in the universe. And notice where this will happen? He will set himself up in God’s temple. Now I’m not convinced from my reading of the Bible that God’s temple in Jerusalem will need to be rebuilt. Instead, it seems clear to me that the New Testament speaks of the church of Jesus Christ as the equivalent of the temple that we find in the Old Testament. So when we read that the man of lawlessness will set himself up in God’s temple, I think, we are meant to conclude that he will set himself up as a leader in the worldwide church of Jesus. And in this position he will lead many professing Christians to commit apostasy by abandoning God’s teaching preserved in the Bible.

He is man who has not yet appeared. We’re told in verse 6 that something is currently holding him back, very probably the Holy Spirit, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. And then in verse 8, Paul assures us that one day the lawless one will be revealed. He is not yet here. He is still to appear on the stage of human history. Let’s make sure we don’t forget that he is also **a man doomed to destruction**. There is no doubt about the fate of this individual. We are told in verse 8 that the *“Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendour of his coming.”* So it won’t be a big battle at the end of history.

Conclusion: Now I don’t know how much you have understood what I have been speaking about this morning, but to make it clear what these verses of the Bible mean for us let me finish by giving us two practical lessons to take away.

False Teaching: let’s recognise that there is such a thing as false teaching in the church of Jesus Christ. It is not just a matter of opinion. We must use the categories of true and false. And let’s not think lawless behaviour in the churches is only destined for a short period of time before Jesus appears to end the world. Have a look at vs7. *“For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work.”* In other words, even today we are likely to see in many so-called Christian churches the evidence of lawless behaviour (And isn’t that exactly what we do see?) Church leaders who set themselves up in God’s temple and declare practices to be legitimate, which the Bible says are forbidden. So, my friends, if a Christian leader tells us they have a direct message from God but it contradicts the Bible then we are to reject what they say as false. Like a bank clerk who handles money, we must familiarise ourselves with the genuine so that we can spot a forgery whenever it comes our way.

God Controls the Future: let’s remember that God controls the future. He will not be surprised by the future apostasy of his people and he will not be surprised by the future appearance of the man of lawlessness. In fact, he will be the one who decides exactly when the lawless one will appear. So let’s be encouraged that our God is in complete control of everything that happens. No one can predict the second coming, but Paul understands that the tide of evil and deception which originates from Satan is being held back by the power of Christ until the time he appears again and all evil will be finally destroyed. Praise God that the power of Jesus is always greater than that of Satan, a defeated enemy. Our part, as the church at the beginning of the 21st C is to carry on the work given to us by the same Jesus and to: *“... stand firm and hold to the teachings (we) passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”*

while they still live here on the earth. You can see the attraction can't you? Who doesn't want a life without sickness and pain? But although we do come across this sort of teaching in 1 Corinthians 4, 2 Timothy 2 and even in many churches today, I'm not persuaded this was the false teaching being communicated here.

Thirdly: A third option could understand the day of the Lord to be a short period of time before the return of Jesus rather than the return of Jesus itself. And it does explain why Paul is so concerned to deal with timetable issues in verses 3-12, rather than on a correct definition of what the day of the Lord actually is. Now it's not difficult to understand why this sort of teaching was causing the Christians at Thessalonica to become unsettled. For example, if you glance back to 1 Thessalonians 5:1, you'll see that Paul had previously said to the church that he would not write to them about the precise times and dates of Jesus' return. So, no wonder they became alarmed when some in their number claimed that Paul had now passed on the news that Jesus' return was just about to happen. Why this change of mind? And what about the rest of his teaching? Could it still be trusted? Because if he had taught them wrong things about the second coming of Jesus, what else had he got wrong? No wonder the Thessalonians were rattled! And just consider what would happen when the Lord Jesus failed to appear as they anticipated. Wrong expectations are deadly for the long-term sustainability of Christians. We can't persist in those circumstances.

What should we believe about the Second Coming of Jesus? The return of Jesus is one of the most significant beliefs of the Christian faith. It is often discredited because of the fanatical and disregarded by the respectable. In order to head off a potential spiritual disaster, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of what they should have believed about the second coming of the Lord Jesus, vs3: *"Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction."* The second coming of the Lord Jesus cannot be just around the corner, says Paul, because two events need to happen first before Jesus is revealed – the rebellion and the coming of the man of lawlessness. Now we don't know for certain the exact relationship between these two events. We're not told if there will be a rebellion first, which at some point will gather pace under the leadership of a particular individual, or if the actions of a particular individual will cause the rebellion to happen. We are promised that Jesus cannot return until the world has witnessed both the rebellion and the appearing of the man of lawlessness, so let's look at these a little closer:

The Rebellion: First of all, the rebellion, or more literally, the world is to expect something Paul calls the apostasy – which means a falling away from faith. Now we need to recognise that this is not a completely new idea. As Jesus taught us in Matthew 24:10: *"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."* We need to understand that in the past there have been occasions when a large number of God's people have given up the faith. They have been guilty of apostasy. And, if I've understood 2 Thessalonians 2 properly, then before the visible appearance of Jesus there will be another large scale falling away from within the church of Jesus Christ. Those who follow error rather than truth.

Man of Lawlessness: Closely linked with this rebellion is the appearance of a rather obscure person called the man of lawlessness. There's no doubt that ever since Paul wrote those words there has been no end of speculation about the identity of this particular individual. In the early years of the Christian church various Roman Emperors were suggested. At the time of the crusades the Western church identified the man of lawlessness as Muhammad. During the Reformation, in the 16th century, Martin Luther referred to the papacy as the man of lawlessness and then the papacy returned the favour by identifying Martin Luther. And in more recent times the names of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and even Bill Gates have become attached to this mysterious figure.

4. Read Matthew 24:1-31. Are there any signs today that the world is ready for the return of Jesus? Are there any signs that have clearly yet to be fulfilled?

5. In what ways have you noticed, verse 7, "... *the secret power of lawlessness (is) already at work.*" in the (worldwide) Church today?

6. How best can we live with and communicate the reality of the return of Jesus without getting involved in the bizarre and fanatical practises and claims that some sects have adopted?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG50: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times (2/5) Power Of Christ Displayed

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Home Group Sermon Notes

22nd May 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: *“It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere.”* How many times you’ve heard someone say something like that? It’s often said in response to a conversation with someone who follows another faith or has no faith at all. But have you ever heard another Christian say something similar, such as: *“I’m not saying that what you believe is wrong or what I am doing is right. I think we are both right in our different ways.”* Have you ever challenged such a proposition? Dare you suggest that someone else might be in error when discussing matters of faith and that you may be right? But have you noticed that in many other areas of life we still talk about the importance of knowing truth from error? Just imagine you were on a British Airways flight to Tenerife and, as you walked up and down the cabin to stretch your legs you overhear the following conversation between the pilot and co-pilot. *“Sir, I’m sure that’s a Virgin Plane heading straight towards us. I think we really should change our course to avoid a collision.” “Well, that’s an interesting observation Bob. But I see things slightly differently. I’m sure it won’t hit us. It might just come close. But in the end, what does it matter? Your opinion is just as valid as mine.”* Can you imagine hearing that at 35,000 feet? And yet in matters of religion those types of conversations happen every day. The categories of true and false are removed and people speak about their sincerely held opinions instead. So why are many people bothered about truth and error when it comes to flying aircraft but not when they discuss the God who made them? Let me suggest two reasons.

Firstly, because many people assume the various religions in the world are simply mankind’s guesses about God. Admittedly, some of the guesses are better than others but in the end a guess is still a guess. And so no one can categorically say that someone else is wrong. Unless, of course, your faith is based on revelation from God rather than on human speculation about him. We believe that God came to earth to find us, whereas religions are about men trying to find God. Which is why Christians can never say it doesn’t matter what people believe about their creator. When God speaks, as he has done through the Old Testament prophets and supremely by sending Jesus, his Son, into the world, our responsibility is to humbly listen and obey, not arrogantly say it’s all just a matter of opinion.

Secondly, I’m convinced that another reason why many people shy away from using the categories of true and false when discussing religious topics is because, in the end, they don’t think it matters. It’s quite understandable that aircraft pilots want to know the truth about a plane’s position, because in their case it’s a matter of life and death. But to many people religion is much further down the list of importance. And if you believe God will save everyone then it hardly matters what a person sincerely believes. Let’s remind ourselves what we looked at a couple of weeks ago in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9: There is a day coming when Jesus: *“Will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”*

It does matter what we believe. There is truth that will take us to heaven and there is falsehood that will condemn us to hell. The stakes are that high. How we respond to the gospel of the Lord Jesus determines where we will spend eternity. It does matter what we believe. And not just at the beginning of our Christian lives. It matters what we believe as we continue to wait for Jesus to return.

What was being taught in Thessalonica? After the reassurance of ch1 to those who are facing persecution for their faith and the amazing truth that God helps a Christian persist through all sorts of trials and tribulations, our focus shifts to the second great danger facing Christians in a world that largely rejects Jesus Christ, the danger of false teaching from within the church. It is much more subtle than outside persecution but its consequences are just as deadly. Vs1&2 tells us: *“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.”* So at the heart of this false teaching is a dangerous misunderstanding about the day of the Lord. It seems that in Paul’s absence a new teaching about the second coming of Jesus had begun to spread among these new believers. And, according to vs2, it was causing them great distress. We are told that the new things they were hearing had unsettled them and now they were in a state of constant alarm. Now you’ll notice from vs2 that Paul is not entirely sure how this false teaching had arrived in the city and suggests three distinct possibilities: Someone had given a false prophecy or ‘word’ from the Lord; maybe a rumour had reached the Christians in Thessalonica from a passing Christian traveller; Or it might even have been that someone had received a forged letter claiming to be from Paul himself; or even a combination of all three. But we simply can’t be sure how this false teaching had arrived in the city.

The Day of the Lord: Someone was claiming that the day of the Lord had already come. Now if we belonged to the Thessalonian church we would have no difficulty understanding what Paul is talking about. Remember how Paul had explained this in some depth in his first letter. It would be an idea frequently discussed in the congregation. Over a cup of coffee everyone would be talking about the latest implications of the arrival of the day of the Lord. But for us, living 2000 years later, we need to think about what Paul could mean and see if we can identify from what he writes elsewhere in his letters to the Thessalonians. I want to suggest three different interpretations of the phrase *“the day of the Lord has already come.”*

Firstly: it could have been the case that some people in the congregation were suggesting that the Lord Jesus had secretly returned to the earth and was currently living somewhere on the planet, perhaps even in Jerusalem. In the days before global communication this was indeed a possibility but I think it is very unlikely that this sort of teaching was actually being talked about. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 you’ll see what Paul had previously written to the church about the second coming of Jesus: *“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”* (you may want to refer to the Home Group notes of 2nd November 2008). It’s not exactly a secret coming is it? We are told about a loud command, the voice of an archangel - which, although I have never heard the voice of an archangel, I presume it’s not a very quiet voice! And then for good measure we even read about a trumpet call of God. Or in other words, when Jesus finally appears it will be loud and it will be public. So it seems very unlikely to me that the Thessalonians could have been fooled by anyone who claimed Jesus had secretly returned to the earth.

Secondly: A second possibility is that some people in Thessalonica were claiming that Jesus had returned in a new spiritual way. They may have been claiming that a superior spiritual life was now on offer for those who wanted it. Forget persecution, forget suffering and forget sickness, this spiritual return of Jesus has opened the way for believers to receive the fullness of the heavenly life