



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?



HG52: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times *(4/5) Proclaiming God's Message*

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Home Group Study Notes

10th July 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)

As we welcome Tom, Claire and Oscar into our church family, share with each other what your hopes and dreams might be during the time Tom is serving his curacy with us - both for Tom and for Emmanuel.



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. In his introduction, Paul (the Rector) spoke about how a lack of discipline and energy affects our prayer life, but what about a lack of conviction? How many Christians are still unconvinced that prayer has any purpose or that it is pointless and achieves very little? Discuss your thoughts with your Home Group.

2. These five verses are the most personal part of (the Apostle) Paul's letter to the Thessalonians: a request for prayer. How best can we encourage those who are constantly in the business of sharing the Good News of the Gospel?

3. How best can we protect ourselves from the destructive criticism of people both within, and without, the church family? Is there anyone who particularly needs protecting? If so, what can you do to help?

3) The Lord's People

In vs3-5 Paul says: *"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."*

No sooner has Paul mentioned the wicked and evil men in vs2 when his mind suddenly returns to the situation in Thessalonica. They too are under pressure from people who have no faith in the Lord Jesus. And so although we may have expected vs3 to read, "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect us from the evil one", this is not what we find.

Instead, we discover that Paul has switched his attention away from himself, after only two verses, and is now concerned again with the Thessalonians. He wants to assure them that the Lord is faithful. In contrast to the faithless people who are trying to ruin their faithfulness, Paul assures them that the God who chose them from the beginning is faithful. They can be certain that he who began a good work in them will carry it on until completion. Or as Paul puts in vs3: *the Lord will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.*

But what does it mean to be protected from the evil one? Well, let's think about what it cannot mean. It cannot mean that the Thessalonians were not to experience any more persecution or that in the future they were not to expect any more inward deception from false teachers. Outside persecution and inside deception will be the experience of Christians until the Lord Jesus returns from heaven. So what is this promise of protection from the evil one? We can be certain that we will never give up the faith. That is what it means to be protected from the evil one. Just think about the ultimate purpose of Satan's weapons. Whether he decides to use physical violence or false teaching, what is the arch enemy of God attempting to do? He is trying to persuade God's people to give up the authentic faith preserved in the Bible.

And so although genuine Christians will suffer for the name of Jesus and genuine Christians will be killed for the name of Jesus, God promises to protect every single one of us from the evil one. He will make sure we persist to the very end. So notice what Paul says in vs4: *"We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command."* Satan will try and stop you but because you are in the Lord, and because the Lord is faithful, Paul has confidence that the Thessalonians will continue to do the things he commands. And yet notice what he also does in verse 5? He prays for them. He knows that God will keep them to the end but he is also persuaded that one of the ways God achieves this is when his people ask him to keep them to the end. And so Paul prays. He says, *"May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."*

Conclusion

In closing, do we want our Christian friends to persevere until the end? Then let's pray this for them. Let's ask God to direct our hearts into the knowledge of his love for us and let's ask him to repeatedly remind us of the example of the Lord Jesus, who despite severe trials, continued to persevere until the very end.

There are many reasons why Christians don't pray. But this morning we have discovered one of the big reasons why we should pray. Wonderfully, we do have a sovereign God. We do have a God who is in complete control of everything that happens. But we also have a God who has chosen to accomplish his plans for his world through our prayers. So let's make sure that whenever we pray, whether it's on our own or with other people, let's make sure we pray for God's message, for God's messengers and for God's people.

And the same is true today. If anyone wants to honour the message of the Lord they must follow the example of the Thessalonians. Instead of dismissing the gospel as the mere opinion of human beings they must obey it as a message from God himself.

And then, as a result, they begin to change their whole way of life. They turn away from whatever idols they are currently worshipping: Finance, friends, family, fitness, fashion. Whatever the idols might be, the person who honours the gospel turns away from them and seeks their security, their protection, their significance and their value, in a relationship with the living God himself.

From now on they hand over control of their life to the true and living God and they wait with eager expectation for his Son Jesus to return from heaven, the one who by his death on the cross has rescued them from the coming judgement. You know, there is no greater thing in life than to honour the gospel. So let me ask you: Have you honoured the gospel? Are you someone who has turned away from your personal idols, whatever they may be, to serve the true and living God? Are you someone who is eagerly waiting for Jesus to appear? And if we have honoured the gospel, do we pray regularly for other people to do the same thing? God wants us to pray that his message will be proclaimed.

2) The Lord's Messengers

We are also to pray that God's messengers will be protected, vs2: *"And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith."* Let us be realistic. The message of the gospel will always face rejection. Not everyone who hears it will believe it. Now, of course, we want them to believe it but we also need to remember that not everyone has been chosen by the Lord, from the beginning. Therefore, preachers of the gospel will inevitably face opposition. Which is why if we pray verse 1 we also need to pray verse 2. I wonder if you spotted the word 'and' at the beginning of the second verse. It's one of those key linking words in the Bible and here it links together prayer 1 and prayer 2.

At the moment, you may have noticed that Tony Blair is on something of a crusade to persuade everyone that all the world religions can live in peace and harmony with each other. And, although deep inside, my heart too does long for such a peaceful and tolerant world, the realistic message of the Bible keeps on reminding me that this will never be the case. Otherwise, why would Paul write what he does in vs2? *"And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith."*

Now, of course, we all have faith in something. It's true that even atheists have a personal faith. In fact, I think atheists probably have more faith than Christians to believe that everything around them is here by chance. But not everyone has the saving faith which Paul talks about at the end of verse 2 – that is, personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so therefore, as a consequence, some of those individuals will actively oppose the preachers of the gospel. It is impossible for the people who teach the Bible to be respected by everyone in their society.

Which means that when we pray that the Lord's message will be proclaimed, we also need to pray for the protection of the Lord's messengers. The opposition will come in many different forms. A large number of bible teachers around the world already face imprisonment and even death for their proclamation of God's message. But regardless of the form the opposition will take, we can be guaranteed that those who announce the message of the Lord will experience hostility against their persons. So when we pray for any Bible teacher we know, whether in this country or further afield, let's remember to ask the Lord to deliver them from the opposition of wicked and evil individuals.

4. Why do you think the Gospel does not seem to spread rapidly in this country when it has such a profound impact on other societies, such as parts of Asia; South America and Africa?

5. Do you think there are aspects of the Gospel that are emphasised too much, while others are not mentioned as much as they should be?

6. How can you better pray that the Lord's message may spread rapidly among your families, friends, neighbours and work colleagues? Might praying ahead to Back to Church Sunday on 25th September be an option? Discuss with your Home Group about ways in which you can faithfully pray for those nearest and dearest to you.



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



HG52: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times (4/5) Proclaiming God's Message

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Home Group Sermon Notes

10th July 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

This is one of those sermons that did not finish up the way I thought it would do when I first started it. I had planned a talk on mission and evangelism, but I was drawn to pursuing the theme of prayer as a means of proclaiming God's message.

Introduction

The scene was tense. Bizarre weather conditions around the world are the signs that a major shift in the earth's climate is under way. A new ice age is about to sweep across the planet. That is the theme of the 2004 disaster movie: *The Day After Tomorrow*.

At long last the American president was prepared to listen to the predictions of one of his expert scientists, Professor Jack Hall. He told the President that everyone south of a particular line on the map of the USA must head straight to Mexico. This was their only hope of survival. But what about those north of the line? What can they do as the cold weather begins to surround them? Asked the President. The scientist replies: *"I'm afraid it's too late for them. If they go outside the storm will kill them. At this point their best chance is to stay inside. Try to ride it out. Pray."*

When all the options are gone, why not pray? Isn't this how many people think about prayer? When life is going well why speak to the ceiling? But when all the other possibilities have been exhausted then we have absolutely nothing to lose. So why not pray?

There are many reasons why Christians don't pray. Sometimes it's because we lack the discipline to pray. Sometimes we don't put aside the time necessary to pray when life is busy. And, as a result, our prayer life is disastrous. Because when we don't put aside time to pray, we don't continue to pray. Don't you find that? Admittedly, say the odd prayer here and there but without discipline we Christians will always struggle to maintain regular contact with the heavenly throne room. For others, the problem lies elsewhere. Not so much a lack of discipline but a lack of energy. Perhaps you know what I mean.

Sometimes the intensity of daily life drains our internal batteries and so we find it increasingly difficult to muster the strength to pray for any duration. And so, in the end, we don't pray. In the first five verses of 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, we have the great joy this morning of rediscovering what God would like us to pray for. Three points: the Lord's Message, the Lord's Messengers and the Lord's People.

1) The Lords Message

Vs1: *"Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you."* We've seen consistently that one of the major themes of 2 Thessalonians is for Christians to hold on to the teachings we find in the Bible.

Against outside persecution and inside deception the truth of the Bible will keep God's people persisting to the end. But here in 3:1 we see that holding on to the word of God is not the only thing Christians are to do as they wait for Jesus to return.

Yes, we are to hold on to the truth but we are also to hold out the truth to other people. Against the background of the final day of judgement, we are to be convinced that the gospel is the only means of salvation from the wrath to come. The Lord's message must be proclaimed. And so therefore Paul asks these young Christians to pray for him.

Now don't you just love that detail? The great apostle values the prayers of these young believers. They have only been Christians for a few months and yet Paul instructs them to pray for him and his missionary colleagues. Let's never think we are too young in our spiritual life to do anything useful. I know there are some people in this congregation who have only been Christians for a short time. Perhaps only for a few weeks or months. So let me ask you: Do you pray like this?

Do you pray that the Lord's message may spread rapidly among your family, friends, neighbours and your work colleagues? Do you pray that when they hear it they will honour it? Do you pray that they will attend our next Alpha Course (in the autumn – so get praying!)? Let's never think we are too young in our spiritual life to do anything useful. And, also, let's never think we are too old in our spiritual life to need the support of others. If the great apostle Paul seeks the prayers of other Christians then what statement are we making if we never ask others to pray for us? God wants us to pray that his message will be proclaimed. He wants us to get down on our knees or to stand up on our feet or even to participate in what I call the evangelical crash position.

You know that uncomfortable thing we do when we stick our head between our knees. It doesn't matter to God how we use our body to pray but he does want us to pray the truth of verse 1. *"Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you."*

Do you not long to see the gospel make progress in this town of Billericay? Do you not long to see more and more people being squashed into Emmanuel on a Sunday and our Home Groups filled to overflowing? Well, if we do then let's pray 3:1. And if we do pray 3:1 then let's make sure we pray the whole verse. So, although it is good to pray that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly it is even better to pray that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured. It is not good enough for the gospel simply to be preached. Now, of course, there is a wrong preoccupation with the results of evangelism. There can be a wrong obsession with the number of people who decide to become Christians over a certain period of time. But there is also a godly concern with the results of evangelism. Because like a successful athlete, the message of the Lord deserves to be honoured.

So let's ask the key question: How does someone honour God's message about Jesus? The clue is at the end of verse 1. They react in the same way as the Thessalonians. *Just as it was with you.* So let's ask the next obvious question: How did the Thessalonians respond to the message? Well, let's find out by looking at 1 Thessalonians 2:13 as describes the initial response of the Thessalonians to his message: *"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."*

And if you glance over the page at 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 you'll see how the Thessalonians respond to the gospel. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. That's how they honoured the gospel.