

2 Thess 1 The supremacy of Christ
Tim Anderson 5/9/21

We're starting a short sermon series today.

We're going to be looking at Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians isn't preached on much.

Why not?

Because there are some tricky bits in it.

In fact there's a tricky bit in every chapter,

so there's no avoiding them.

But there are some wonderfully encouraging truths to grasp hold of too.

So we don't want to be put off by the tricky bits.

One of the reasons

why Biblical Christianity is a tough sell in our culture

is because it makes exclusive claims.

An exclusive claim is one that shuts people out.

Jesus said things like,

"I am the way the truth and the life,

no-one comes to the Father except through me."

That's one of the most famous statements in the gospels.

It's also one of the hardest for people today to accept.

You see if no one comes to the Father except through Jesus,

then they aren't coming to the Father through Judaism,

they aren't coming to the Father through Buddha,

they aren't coming to the Father through Muhammad.

It has such an I'm right, you are wrong feel to it,

that it's just very hard for people today to accept.

Most people never get

to the point of examining whether the claim might be true.

Exclusive claims repel them so much,

that they reject the claim because it's exclusive,

without even investigating it.

So let's think about the kinds of claims people make today.

They say things like,
"All religions are just different paths to lead you to God.
If you want to be a Christian that's fine,
just so long as you don't tell other people
they are wrong for following their religion."
It sounds so tolerant.
It's music to Australian ears.
But think about it.
The statement "All religions are just different paths to lead you to God"
is itself an exclusive claim.
It sounds tolerant.
But it's actually intolerant.
It's intolerant of people
who believe that only one religion can lead you to God.
That is it's intolerant of Christians -
that's 1.5 Billion people.
It's intolerant of Muslims -
that's more than a Billion people.
It's intolerant of Hindus -
that's about a Billion people.
"All religions are just different paths to lead you to God"
is a truth claim that shuts out Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews ...
It's an exclusive claim.
In fact every claim about the truth is exclusive.
If you say something is true,
then automatically that excludes people who think it's false.

Some parts of 2 Thess 1 will jar as you read them.
Our culture has trained us not to make jarring truth claims.
But since every truth claim excludes,
the criteria we must use to judge them is not,
"Do they offend 21C ears?"
It's "Are they true?"
It makes a lots of sense
that a truth claim should be judged by the question "Is it true?"

You can judge a back massage by whether it makes you feel good.
You judge a truth claim by whether it's true.
Too many people today
judge truth claims by whether they make them feel good.

Well that's an important introduction to 2 Thess 1.
It contains truth claims that are just as jarring as
"I am the way, the truth and the life,
no one comes to the Father except through me."

But we start with Paul's prayer of thanksgiving.
He begins his letter as he usually does,
by thanking God for the people he's writing to.
In his letters to churches,
Paul thanks God for the church in every letter except Galatians.
In Galatians,
he's grumpy with them and goes straight into telling them off.
But here as he most often does,
he begins with thanksgiving.
I take my cue from Paul.
When I'm praying for you guys,
I start with thanking God for you.
Do you know,
we have in our church brothers and sisters
whose faith in God has not been shaken
by really dreadful situations in their lives?
They've got serious health issues.
Or they've lost loved ones dear to them in awful circumstances.
Or they've faced violent or abusive situations in their lives.
Or they've been ripped off by people they trusted.
So I thank God for their steadfast faith.
Lots of people would be rocked by those experiences.
But God has strengthened these folk by the power of his Spirit.
That's worth thanking God for.
And you don't have to think too hard

to come up with a host of other things to thank God for.
 Try it out!
 It really helps you appreciate the people around you.

What does Paul thank God for about the Thessalonians?
 1:3-4 "We ought always to thank God for you brothers and sisters,
 and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more,
 and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.
 Therefore among God's churches
 we boast about your perseverance and faith
 in all the persecutions and trials you are experiencing."
 Three things he thanks God for.
 Growing faith, increasing love, and perseverance.
 It almost sounds like Paul's famous triad of godly virtues.
 Faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love.
 You remember that from 1 Cor 13, right?
 Well it actually is the same three things,
 just the hope is a little bit disguised.
 In 1 Thess, Paul thanks God for their,
 "work produced by faith,
 their labour prompted by love,
 and their perseverance inspired by hope."
 So in Paul's mind, perseverance is a fruit of hope.
 And that makes sense.
 How do you keep on going in the face of difficulties?
 How do you persevere?
 You have a hope for the future.
 The woman in labour can keep going
 because of the thought of the baby that is about to be born.
 The Christian can keep going
 because of the thought of being with Jesus in heaven for eternity.
 Hope inspires perseverance.
 So Paul is thanking God for their faith, hope and love.
 And he does that
 because he sees the evidence of these qualities increasing.

He thanks God for their faith, hope and love because faith, hope and love come from God. So God is the right person to thank for them.

So that's the first part of our reading, the thanksgiving. In the next part of our reading we have the vindication. This is where the tricky bit is.

Paul says, 1:5 "All this is evidence that God's judgement is right, and as a result, you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering."

What is evidence that God's judgement is right?

Their growing faith, love and perseverance.

It shows that they really are his children.

But they are suffering for it.

And so Paul tells them

what God is going to do about their unjust suffering.

This is the part that is a very exclusive claim.

1:6-9 "God is just:

He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.

This will happen

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

They will be punished with a everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ..."

Wow, that's strong stuff.

To our generation, it sounds very intolerant to believe that kind of thing. But as I said at the beginning,

any truth claim is intolerant of people who disagree.

The question is, is it true?

Will the Lord Jesus really be revealed from heaven in blazing fire?

Will he really punish those who don't know God
and don't obey the gospel?

Will they really be punished with everlasting destruction
and be shut out from the presence of the Lord?

The answer is yes.

All those things are true.

How do I know?

Because this is God's apostle speaking.

God speaks to us through his apostle
and he doesn't lie.

Because this matches up with what is said in other parts of Scripture.
Jesus tells us this is what will happen in the gospels.

The apostle John tells us this what will happen in Revelation.

God's spokesmen are united in saying this is what is going to happen.

Is God powerful enough to make this happen?

Well he raised Jesus from the dead.

He's demonstrated his power.

If he says it's going to happen,

it's going to happen.

What do these verses tell us about judgement day?

1. This is a very different picture of Jesus to the gospels.

He's not a baby in a manger.

He's not a humble carpenter teaching the crowds.

He's not an oppressed prisoner nailed to a cross.

When he comes for a second time,

he's a mighty judge.

He has his army of angels with him.

It's not a time for people to respond to him.

It's a time for them to be judged

for how they have already responded to him.

2. The basis of judgement

is whether you have obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It talks about knowing God as well.

But because that's a phrase easy to misunderstand,

it clarifies with the phrase 'do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus'.
Now we would normally talk about believing the gospel.

The gospel is the message
about how Jesus died from our sins and rose again.

It's something that you believe, not something you obey, right?

Well not so fast.

The gospel is a message to believe.

But it's also a message to obey.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead makes him Lord of all creation.

You obey the gospel when you live with Jesus as your Lord.

It's one thing for him to be generally Lord of all creation.

It's another thing for you to acknowledge,

"OK if he's lord of everything,
that means he's Lord of me too.

I need to live like that."

Obedying the gospel means living with Jesus as your Lord.

How do we respond to these verse about Judgement Day?

1. They mean that we can relax and let Jesus judge.

The Thessalonians had faced all kinds of unjust persecutions and trials.

A natural response from human beings

is that we was to get even when we've been wronged.

What are the Taliban doing right now?

They are shooting everyone who cooperated with the Americans.

They are getting even.

Settling scores.

That's the way of this world.

But it doesn't need to be the way for Christians.

"God is just: he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you."

God is going to settle scores.

That means we don't need to.

So this teaching about Judgement Day

that seems so intolerant,

is actually the reason that Christians can afford to turn the other cheek.

It's quite a paradox.

The teaching that the world rebels against
is the teaching that gives us the power to live like Jesus.
To love our enemies.

To do good to those who persecute us.

2. Our second response to Judgement Day

concerns how we think about those who don't obey the gospel of Jesus.
Their prospect is bleak.

Their future is being punished with everlasting destruction
and being shut out from the presence of the Lord.

What do we do with that?

It's not much good getting a megaphone
and standing on Flinders street station shouting about it to people.

Some people have tried that,
and it hasn't been very effective.

Trying to bully people into becoming Christians
with the threat of Judgement Day

is both ineffective and not what God wants from us.

Remember that 2 Thessalonians is written to Christians.

It's not written to scare non believers.

It's written to exhort and encourage believers.

But it means that we as Christians

should take the prospect of Judgement Day very seriously.

If there's something that we can do

to help people avoid everlasting destruction

and being shut out from the presence of the Lord

then we should do it.

We've got Compassion coming to our service next Sunday.

Compassion do sponsor children.

World Vision do too.

If you choose to sponsor a child,

does it matter whether you do it through Compassion or World Vision?

Well if you take Judgement Day seriously then it does.

Compassion and World Vision both provide for the physical needs
of the child that is sponsored.

But only Compassion will make sure

that the child is taught to obey the gospel of Jesus.
 They're not with megaphones on Flinders Street station.
 But they are there trying to help disadvantaged children
 avoid being shut out from the presence of the Lord.
 If reading 2 Thess 1 affects you as a Christian,
 then you could respond to that
 by making sure that your acts of mercy
 are helping people obey the gospel of Jesus.
 It's the same reason we choose to use ARDFA for aid and development.
 We could use any one of a number of secular charities.
 Medicin san Frontier, Save the Children, Unicef.
 But none of these
 will help the people they serve obey the gospel of Jesus.
 Judgement Day is real.
 So our decisions need to reflect that reality.

Ok so we've looked at the thanksgiving,
 as Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians.
 We've looked at their vindication,
 as Paul tells them what God is going to do
 to show that their persecutions and trials have been avenged.
 Then finally, we look at his prayer from them, verses 11-12.
 "With this in mind, we constantly pray for you,
 that our God may make you worthy of his calling,
 and that by his power he may bring to fruition
 your every desire for goodness
 and your every deed prompted by faith."
 When Paul prays for the Thessalonians,
 he prays for more of what he thanked God for at the start.
 So in verses 3-4, he thanked God for their faith, love and perseverance.
 Here he's asking for more of it.
 First he asks that God would make them worthy of his calling.
 We shouldn't take it from that
 that there is any doubt about their salvation.
 As Paul said in verse 5,

he's confident
 that they will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.
 But you see you can be counted worthy without actually being worthy.
 That's the great grace and generosity of God.
 We're counted worthy on the basis of Jesus' goodness not our own.
 But just because we're counted worthy through what Jesus has done,
 it doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to live
 the position we have been granted.
 Paul is praying that the Thessalonians would become the people
 that God has counted them to be.
 How are they going to become those people?
 That God would bring to fruition their every desire for goodness.
 That God would bring to fruition their every deed prompted by faith.
 Paul is praying that when they desire godliness,
 that God would make their desire a reality.
 Have you ever desired that you could be a more godly person?
 Maybe you've been frustrated
 by some sinful behaviour that you just keep falling into.
 Maybe you've looked at another Christian and thought,
 "I wish I could be patient like her."
 or "I wish I could my heart was filled with joy like his is".
 Paul is praying that when the Thessalonians have those desires,
 that God would turn their desires into reality.
 Paul is praying that when their inner voice tells them,
 "You know, it would be a really good thing to do some good deed."
 That they would actually do what they plan to.
 How many times have you planned to do something good,
 and never gotten around to it?
 Maybe you think,
 it would be a really good thing to call up so and so,
 we've been locked down and she lives by herself.
 But you got busy and didn't get there.
 Paul is praying that God would turn their good plans into reality.

 I wonder if you've ever prayed prayers like that?

I look at the liturgical prayers in our services,
and they are nothing like that.

We pray to confess our sins.

We pray for the world,

for God's mercy on trouble spots and disasters,

for God's healing for the sick.

We pray for our leaders.

We pray for the church.

But do we ever pray for each other

That God would bring to fruition our every desire for goodness?

That God would bring to fruition our every deed prompted by faith?

I think

there is precious little prayer for increase in godliness in our services.

And yet these prayers that Paul prays for the Thessalonians

are his standard prayers for all of the churches.

You turn to any one of his letters.

These are the kinds of things he prays for.

We ought to be praying them more.

So why don't I stop talking about it and do it?