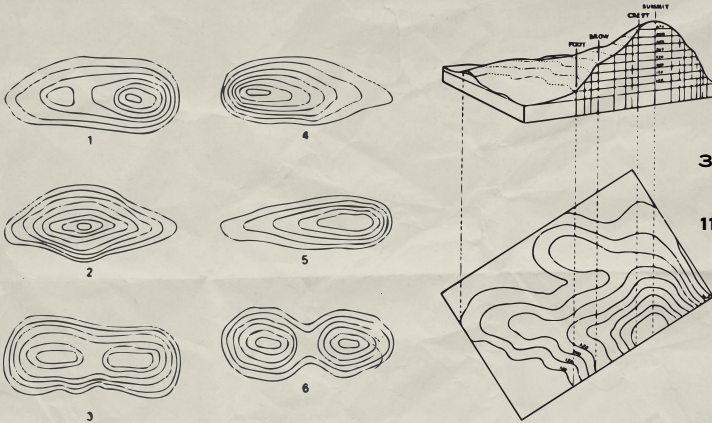


GAINING



LONGITUDE
34° 3' 20.0484" N
LATITUDE
117° 10' 57.1476" W

Fig. 10. The block diagram shows a hill with contours drawn on it. Note how the map below represents a projection of the contours.

GAINING GROUND



LONGITUDE
34° 3' 20.0484" N
LATITUDE
117° 10' 57.1476" W

GROUND

It often feels like the ground is falling apart beneath our feet. This series is meant to regain the grounding of Christ beneath our feet.

We will be doing six weeks in the books of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. These books deal with the end of time, the second coming of Jesus, and how to live as apocalyptic people. However, rather than being a proponent of creating fear in people so they might believe in God, Paul takes a different tack. Paul wants people to understand so they DON'T have to live in fear, rather than pushing them to more anxiety.

Lovewell,

Pastor Tim

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'TJ' or 'TS' with a stylized flourish.



Gaining Ground

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WEEK 01

Day 1-7

What's going on? | 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Jesus Return Death.

We can live in confidence in the presence if we are informed about the future.

WEEK 02

Day 8-14

Dark and Light | 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Second Coming, Salvation.

The most important preparation for Jesus' return is to be in the right relationship with him through salvation —rather than to be caught up in predicting his return

WEEK 03

Day 15-21

1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

God's will, Godly Living

We might know the day or time of Jesus's return, but we can always know God's will for us is to live godly lives of faithful obedience.

WEEK 04

Day 22-28

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Holy Judgment, Consequences

We can't base our understanding of the truth on what makes us comfortable, but instead, on the person of Jesus.

WEEK 05

Day 29-35

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

Deception

We can stand firm in Christ when we know the truth. Paul encouraged believers not to be misled nor afraid concerning the second coming of Christ.

WEEK 06

Day 36-42

2 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Balance, Work

We should live wisely and responsibly in the present while waiting for the future with hope.

Introduction:

Whenever we look to apocalyptic literature (Daniel, Revelation) we see the end of time, the end of the world, and great trials and tribulation. It has a way of creating anxiety and nervousness in a great many people. If you come from the Seventh-day Adventist faith tradition, you understand that anxiety. Revelation seminars, Bible studies, and posters of beasts definitely create a specific sense of dread in us. Now, I want to be clear; these things have their merits, so they should not be thrown out with any bathwater we may be expelling. However, an emphasis on the end of time without an emphasis on Jesus is not only a miscalculation, it just might be spiritual malpractice! Any study that does not lead to peace, understanding, and a greater sense of the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit is just pandering to our basest fears if we are not careful.

We decided to change our series after our Easter "Awakening Series." We were going to do a series on the book of Joshua, which we will come back to eventually. However, we felt that doing something that would give us an incredible dose of hope in troubling times would be more appropriate. We have decided on 1 & 2 Thessalonians in order to see what the Apostle Paul has to say about living in troubled times, and how he is deeply invested in making sure that people understand how it all works at the end of all things, and at the end of our particular lives. So we hope this brings some hope, some peace, and some wisdom to how we are all living right now.

WEEK 1

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18 (NLT)

13 And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. **14** For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

15 We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. **16** For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. **17** Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. **18** So encourage each other with these words.

13 And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope.

“We do not want you not to know...”

This is perhaps the best translation of these words. Paul is concerned for his dear brothers and sisters, his family in Christ, that they have some misunderstandings and confusion about what happens to people who die. His concerns stem from the confusion that has always surrounded death and dying. Also, this set-up linguistically means that Paul is going to introduce some new material, or material that is familiar, but is given in a new way. Some translations say “We do not want you to be ignorant,” and this is the set-up I am speaking about.

Wait, let us take a moment. We just jumped into the text without preamble or introduction; the reason for this is the urgency of the message. Not just for the people in Thessalonica, but for us as well. We have been living in such difficult times. While we begin with death, we are also going to be speaking about what it means to live in difficult and perilous times. It is possible that by the time this series is happening, that life will be back to normal. However, I have this feeling that we will still be trying to fight our fear and anxiety through this difficult time. If things haven't changed, then many of us will have been in isolation for almost a month. These words of Paul will be particularly timely for us. We will have missed Easter together, which hasn't happened since Jesus was on the

cross. He was the only one who has gone through the Easter narrative utterly alone. Now, we may have a sense of that isolation.

Paul wanting people to understand what happens when someone dies does not necessarily mean that many different thoughts were being believed and preached in the churches. Paul wanted to alleviate people's fear and anxiety that always appear in these situations. As the death toll rises during a pandemic, we may have many of the same fears. Death is always seen as the worst possible outcome. Paul wanted people to understand a few things: **1)** Death is only a moment of separation, not a final outcome. And **2)** Knowledge of God, His love, and His compassion for us will allow us to walk into these situations with clarity, hope, and courage.

This passage is written in a paraenetic, or frenetic fashion. It is a review of familiar material, but Paul wanted to get it out to the churches. While it may be familiar for the 1st century churches, it is something that needs to be repeated often. Sometimes, as I preach, I almost feel a sense of *deja vu*, due to the repetitive nature of the messages in the New and Old Testament. However, this has a tendency to remind me of how hard it is to get the promises and character of God to stick in our hearts. My bet is that people were the same in the 1st century and had a hard time remembering just how good God really is. Just like us, they need to hear

these messages again and again for them to embed themselves in our very DNA.

There is so much more to this verse, but our time is running short. Suffice it to say that Paul wants us to have some information so that when we grieve, we do so

with hope, which is so unlike the grief of those who can't believe they will see those who have passed again. As we go through times of loss, the ability to see past death into something greater is a gift, a privilege and an act of defiance.

1 – What messages do you need to hear again and again so they will embed themselves into your heart?

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2 – What practice can you put in place to remind you of how good God really is?

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3 – What does “not to grieve as others do who have no hope” mean?

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14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

Simply put, the basis of this Christian hope, “not to grieve as others who have no hope” is clearly stated. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we can also believe in the resurrection of those believers who have died. Why couldn’t we? All of our theology leads to this apex, this crux in the story of Jesus. His death conquered sin, and his resurrection conquered death.

There is an interesting statement here: “we believe.” It is possible this was part of an early creedal statement the first century Christians would say. It summarized what the Christians believed in to others who might not know. How often do we begin our statement of beliefs to others this way?

I want to ask you today what sort of language you use when stating your faith? I understand that to boldly proclaim that you believe Jesus died and rose again is something we start to do more often around Easter, but often we don’t keep this at the forefront of our faith. It is easy for us to say that we believe in Jesus, but harder to say we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul’s argument is if we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is it really so hard to believe in the death and resurrection of those who believe in him as well? I would ask the same question.

One leads to the other. And while

this is a relatively easy logic equation, we would have to argue that simple human logic would have to be left at the door to believe in these statements. If you believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, he then has the power to resurrect those who were interested in that same resurrection for themselves. (I have stated this in a very particular way. I hope you noticed. There are some who believe that in the end, Jesus will bring everyone to him. While I love that sentiment, I have a hard time believing that a God who did not force His will on us during our lifetimes would force His will on us in death—I am sure there is a lot more to be said, but I will leave this here.)

This sentence, for Paul, is a logical conclusion from the previous sentence. He wants us to understand that in this system of faith, one leads to the other, and there should be some comfort in this.

I write this as, just yesterday, I have heard that one of our former church members has died from this worldwide pandemic. So these words hit home. And while I did not know this former member, I have so many friends who did know him, know his family, his daughters, his wife. I think of this text as they grieve for him. But I know they do not grieve as ones without hope. Because of their belief in the resurrection of Jesus, they have a belief in the resurrection of their husband and father. Without this hope, the night is dark and there is no

light. However, with this hope, they can see beyond the sickness, the death, and even the separation. While their pain will be palpable, tangible, and suffocating, it will not win.

1 – Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

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2 – Do you believe he has the power to resurrect those who have chosen to be part of those he resurrects again?

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3 – Is this something you want in your life?

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15 We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died.

Who is Paul quoting here? He says that this statement he is about to make is a revelation directly from the Lord. Did Jesus ever say this? No. We don't have any record of this statement coming from Jesus. So where did it come from?

Some commentators think that it could have come from the apostles to Paul, while others think that it could have been a direct revelation from God to Paul. The truth is, we don't have a clear understanding of the provenance of this statement. Some have argued it was a real fear in the church that the dead would be raised after Jesus came, but this is a bit of an ungrounded argument, it seems. (The New American Commentary: 1, 2. Martin, D. Michael)

So what should we believe about the origins of this statement? I don't think it is a long stretch to believe Paul was given insight others were not. It is certainly possible he was commenting on something that was familiar to the Christians at the time, but if not, it does not mean he did not have revelation from God on this subject. As Christians, we believe there are times God speaks to and through people. This is not a long stretch for us, so to believe this about Paul is reasonable in our worldview.

Regardless, for Paul, he wanted to stress to his readers that these words were important. Why is a timeline important for us to understand? Remember, Paul was writing to the church in Thessalonica

and there had been some deaths that had occurred, even though the church itself was relatively new. Perhaps Paul was writing to assuage fears, perhaps he was writing to give them courage to some upcoming persecutions—which did happen later. However, it is in a more general sense that Paul is giving them this teaching. Regardless of persecution and regardless of their situation, Paul is wanting to alleviate any stress and misunderstanding they have about what will take place. Again, a timeline is a tangible way to understand this great hope.

I know the second coming of Jesus is sometimes hard to get our heads around. It is so "other" than what we experience and how we live. My hope is that the idea of the second coming of Christ is a comfort. We don't know the day or the hour, but we are getting some reassurance from Paul there is a plan and a process. He is sure, and we can be sure of his words, that God has this all in His hands.

One more note about the timeline. Can you imagine seeing those who have gone before you rise up? What sort of feeling of excitement would that give you? What would you say to them? Would you be jumping up to meet them? I can't imagine my excitement to see them again.

1 – Does the idea of the second coming of Christ give you comfort or fear?

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2 – How does knowing that the dead in Christ rising first give you a better understanding of the process?

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3 – Why would this be important in your life?

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16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves.

Wow, this is awesome, and a continuation of v. 15. We are continuing our timeline, as Paul is outlining what will happen on that day. However, its brevity is glaring and there are a ton of details I would like to know that are left out. The sequence of events is even truncated. But we are given what happens in four movements between v. 16 and 17, albeit seemingly-incomplete. Here are the movements:

1. **The Lord will descend.**
2. **The dead will rise.**
3. **The living will be “caught up.”**
4. **We will live with the Lord forever.**

It will take us two days to unpack this.

The two major movements in v. 16 are that the Lord will descend and the dead will rise. Remember, the disciples saw Jesus ascend into the clouds and were promised he would return in the same way. (Acts 1:9-11; Mark 13:26) So the assumption this would happen in a reverse manner makes sense. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 10 speak to their faith, eagerly awaiting the second coming. But they are not to wait for another birth, another baby to descend. Rather, we are to expect a fully grown Jesus to descend from heaven.

(Why do I even mention this? isn't this obvious?) I suppose it is, for those of us

with a strong background in eschatological thinking (sorry, “end-time” thinking). But for those who weren't brought up in this world, there is nothing we can assume. As well, there are certainly people and “prophets” (usually “doomsday prophets”) who were born, grew up, and then decided that they were more than simply humans, but have even declared themselves saviors and gods. We can simply reject these people as part of the second coming of Christ as they started their journey on this earth as an infant. Scripture here seems to indicate that this is not the case with the second coming of Jesus.

In the same way that Paul does not want you to be ignorant, I don't want you to be fooled. When we begin to think about all of this, it is easy to get confused, and there are certainly those who profit off of confusion, even those within the church. As we stick to scripture, we can be assured of God's clarity in all of this. To be sure, you and I have heard some really interesting and strange things coming from people who are anxious, searching for answers or trying to profit off of confusion and fear. When you hear these things that don't seem quite right, refer back to scripture and let it be your guide through troubling and troubled times.

A couple of other things we should mention about this text: “With the voice of

the archangel" connotes the heavenly host, or army of God. Mark also records that Jesus will come "with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). It implies that the same hosts that heralded his coming in the stories we retell at Christmas are here with him. Jesus does not come alone, but rather, with all those angels he has created and who give him praise.

"With the trumpet call of God" is used

for a variety of purposes in ancient texts, but it was not so much about a musical instrument as it is about giving signals. It could herald the coming of a great person or a great event, or even to give a warning to people in military settings. It was used to signal the Hebrews' encounter with God at Sinai (Exodus 19:16,19).

1 – What are some of the weird things you have heard about the end of time?

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2 –How do we guard ourselves from becoming confused?

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3 – Do you think that Paul was having to work hard to keep people from being confused even back then?

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17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

Three interesting points: we will be “caught up.” We will be together with them (meaning the dead in Christ). And “then we will be with the Lord forever.” Let’s break this down.

To be “Caught up” is an interesting phrase. It is probably understanding that movement to or from the presence of God is something under God’s control, as well as it being in the clouds. It was mentioned before that Jesus ascended into the clouds, and so our reunion with him would take place in the clouds, as well. Often in the Old Testament, theophanies (or the revealing of God) took place as God’s glory was seen through the clouds. Take a moment and think about it; have you ever seen the sun shine through the clouds? Of course you have, and it often takes our minds back to seeing God revealed through the clouds. That breaking of the sun onto the ground, and those beams that are breaking through have a tendency to remind us of who God is. So at the end of time, we are “caught up” to see the glory of God in the clouds. We are no longer simple observers, but we are participants, first hand, at this revealing.

Secondly, we will be together with those who have been raised from the dead. There is no advantage to being alive when Christ comes. We are all caught up together as we move toward Christ. I don’t know if this will be a time of reunion, simple aston-

ishment, or a time to collect our thoughts; but it happens with all of us together.

Allow me to muse for a moment; think about being lifted up into the clouds, but you see those you have lost, those you have missed, and you cry out to them. A simple wave will suffice, but it changes everything. How full would your heart be to know you will see your parents, your grandparents, friends you have lost along the way, and others? Can we even hope to dream this dream? I understand it feels almost farcical, but, oh, what an amazing day that will be!

Thirdly, we will be with “the Lord forever.” This almost seems truncated, or cut off. We need so much more explanation of what this means! I don’t know about you, but I want more information about what this will be like. How will we live? How will we get around? How will it look, taste, smell, feel? We just have this one statement that allows us way too much imagination. And of course, over the last 2000 years since this was written, Pastors, Priests, Teachers and Christians of all sorts have sought to show us exactly what it will be like.

Let me pause here. We don’t know what heaven is like. And Paul, for some reason, decided not to tell us. Of course, there are generalities, there are broad statements; but when push comes to shove, we don’t know. We don’t have to know.

What we do know is that it will be forever, and it will be with God and with others. Isn't that the complete fulfillment of the law? (Matthew 22:36-40) We will have all the time in the universe to love God and love others. Truthfully, I couldn't care less what heaven is like. Whatever God has

prepared for us is fine with me. I am not going to spend my time worrying or guessing what I will be doing. I would rather use my time on this earth to encourage my brothers and sisters, to share Jesus with as many people as I can, and to remind people that God is for us and not against us.

1 – What stories have you heard about what heaven is like? Do they all make sense?

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2 – Who are you most excited to see again when Jesus comes?

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3 – How do you get your head around the concept of “forever”?

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18 So encourage each other with these words.

I love this word “encourage.” Paul uses this word quite a bit. In Romans 1:12 he talks about mutually encouraging one another in order that faith would be grown both in him and in the life of those Christians in Rome. One of the main reasons we gather together each week in community is so we might encourage one another in our faith. I think that we have missed that when we don’t get together. This time of isolation has made this need for encouragement into a real and tangible situation. I am hoping that when we meet together again, we have grabbed ahold of this idea of encouragement toward one another.

It is too often a truism that when people of faith come together, they tear each other apart rather than encouraging one another. I would posit that the majority of us have stories of being mistreated in church, judged by other members, or simply not encouraged through a worship experience. This is an unfortunate reality, but it doesn’t have to be. When we commit ourselves to encourage one another each time we come together, not only is our faith grown, but people want to be around each other in a much more positive manner.

What if, every time you came to church, you were encouraged to love more, show more grace, and lean into compassion for others. What if you were not torn down, but grown in faith. What if you didn’t feel shame, incompetence in your spiritual growth, and given a feeling of unworthiness; rather, you

were encouraged as a child of God, brought into community, and made to feel as a brother or a sister. Isn’t this what church is supposed to be?

Probably the majority of you reading this are members or somehow connected to Crosswalk, and I certainly hope this is your experience. However, if it is not, you can be part of the change that makes this so. If you belong to a church that does not have these values of encouragement in place, what can you do to change it toward this expression of hope and grace? I don’t believe people want to discourage others at church, (maybe some do. . .) but by-and-large people of faith do want to encourage one another. Unfortunately, sometimes they want to encourage you in other ways than toward Christ. They want you to look a certain way, act a certain way, or be the same kind of Christian they are.

I don’t believe in that. I think that the most positive thing we can do as Christians is encourage one another toward Christ, and he sorts our behavior, our motivations, and our lives. The Holy Spirit convicts hearts and minds to conform to the ways of Christ as we are encouraged toward him and toward community. So let’s make that our job. Let’s be the encouragers the world needs.

1 – Who can you encourage today? Be specific.

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2 – What do they need to hear to become closer to Christ?

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3 – How can you give them more than encouraging words, but encouraging actions as well?

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These texts have been revelatory in the way they have opened our eyes to see how Jesus will come again, from the apostle's perspective. They are also encouraging as we see the apostle not wanting us to be in any way confused or ignorant of what will happen to and for those who have gone ahead of us, and how Jesus will come back. This process and plan should reduce the anxiety we feel as we look at the eschatological realities of our faith.

Eschatology is the study of end-times, and make no mistake, Christians are "end-time" people. We have always looked to the second coming of Jesus as a moment to anticipate with great joy. However, we also have approached these ideas with great trepidation. Why trepidation? Because with the end of time comes some pretty significant events. Wars, rumors of wars, sickness and financial concern. And I know, that sounds pretty much like what we have been living through over the last few weeks and months. I mean, we were not even able to come together as a community to celebrate Easter this year. There are definitely some end-time things that are happening these days, but does that mean it is the End-Of-All-Times?

Every generation has read these things, looked at the eschatology we find in scripture, and decided that the end-times are here. Now, let me be clear, I do believe we are an end-time people with an end-time worldview, and I am okay with that. I do not have anxiety that the world will end, as that is something that is deeply believed in my faith system. However,

I do not know when this will happen for everyone. But through this epidemic, I am reminded that it can happen at any time for any of us. I am always living at the end of time, as are you. While no one knows the day or the hour of the coming of Jesus, we also don't know the day or the hour of the end of our own time. So nothing is promised us as far as longevity, and what tomorrow holds; however, the end is already established for us.

In what manner do you think about the end of time? Does it cause anxiety, fear, or joyous anticipation? Are we afraid of losing what we have, or are we excited for what is going to be given to us? How can we work through our emotions when it comes to what is next and what is ultimate?

WEEK 2

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11 (NLT)

1 Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write you. **2** For you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. **3** When people are saying, "Everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.

4 But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. **5** For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. **6** So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. **7** Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. **8** But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. **10** Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. **11** So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

1 Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write to you. 2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.

There is a shift in emphasis at this point in the text. Chapter 4, last week, had us clarifying what happens to those who have passed on before us. This should give us a sense of comfort, a sense of peace, and even anticipation that we will see those who have fallen asleep in Jesus again, at the second coming of Jesus. Chapter 5 shifts the emphasis to the responsibility of the living. As we should remain alert and prepared for that day of the coming of Jesus, as we are fully aware it is in the offing.

It almost seems as if the apostle is writing about two different events; however, this is not the case. While the emphasis becomes the "day of the Lord," and judgment and responsibility are spoken of, this is not a separate event from the coming of Jesus. They occur at the same time. The intent in these next verses is a challenge to believers as they seek to live faithfully, and even expectantly, in great anticipation of this coming day.

The way this section begins is quite interesting; he is basically saying that it is of no value to write to you about when this is all going to happen. It seems that this conversation is one that Paul has had before with these believers. While the second coming was going to take unbelievers by surprise ("a thief in the night"), it would not take believers in the same way, as they would have

been preparing for this all along. They were not to be caught unaware, as the second coming is as inevitable as it is unpredictable.

Wait a second! If the second coming of Jesus is both inevitable and unpredictable, why have so many believers over the years tried to predict it? Truthfully, our own faith tradition is guilty of this exact mistake. We even celebrate it as "the great disappointment" each year. How strange is that? Why is it people, believers in particular, are always seeking to predict the exact moment Jesus will come again?

I think it is pretty simple: It is easier to plan than to prepare. For instance, when you plan to go to Disneyland on Tuesday, you can get ready on Monday, lay out the snacks, put your best Disney hoodie out on the chair, check traffic when you get up in the morning, and have a great day! However, when you simply know you will have the opportunity to go to Disneyland at some point, you feel the need to always be preparing for the trip. The former is so much easier than the later. When we don't know, and have to live a life of preparation, it is much harder than to simply plan for a specific day or hour. It is human nature. We want to know, specifically, when something is going to happen.

I have three kids, and when they were small, they could not think in the abstract. If

we were going to do something, we would have to let them know exactly when so they could mitigate their expectations. This is hard when they can't tell time yet! However, as they got older, they began to understand the nuance between planning and preparing. They still want specifics, but as they mature, they understand the variables that make things change. And when those changes occur, they are not disappointed

like they used to be; rather, they have learned to roll with the punches.

Paul does not think it a worthwhile conversation to talk about the day, hour, season, or year this will all happen. He is more concerned with the inevitability of the second coming than the predictability of it. Perhaps we should learn to live our lives this way as well.

1 – Have you ever wondered when Jesus is coming back?

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2 – Have you ever been frustrated that you didn't know?

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3 – Do you remember thinking about this when you were younger? How did it make you feel? Is it different now that you are older? How?

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3 When people are saying, “Everything is peaceful and secure,” then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman’s labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.

In the previous text we see the beginning of two analogies that Paul uses to think about the second coming of Jesus and the futility of trying to figure out when it is to occur. The first is the most famous, “like a thief in the night.” We have heard that ad nauseam our whole lives. This and v. 3 are used to talk about the “day of the Lord,” which if you know Jewish scriptures has much to do with Judgment, so it is sometimes looked upon with trepidation. (Amos 5:18-20)

But remember, without judgment, there is no deliverance on the day of the Lord, so we can approach this idea of judgment as good news. In the New Testament, it is Jesus who is the Lord who is appointed to judge the world (Acts 17:31), so when your judge is also your advocate, it has to be good news. The scales are stacked in your favor.

But this judgment will come like a thief in the night, which is a phrase used often in the New Testament. (Matthew 24:36-43; Luke 12: 35-40; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3;16:15) So for the apostle to use it in this instance is not only appropriate, but familiar. In all of its usage, it is not a prediction of a particular time, but more a prediction of a particular attitude. Even in the analogy of the pregnant woman’s labor pains, we see the attitude of unreadiness, unpreparedness, and a general misunderstanding of what is really happening.

The text for today has people saying

“everything is peaceful and secure...” when disaster falls. Wow, this seems prophetic for our year so far. As I write this, we are in a “shelter-in-place” order for California, my office has moved home, and I am in my garage. Times have changed, and it didn’t take too long.

I remember when we had our first child. We were in a Target by our house, and things got serious fast. We knew we were close, and we were prepared. But when the labor begins in earnest, you lose your mind a bit. We had bags packed, snacks ready (for me, honestly) and we were clear on the route to the hospital. The only problem was, we were not at home. We were not too far away, we had just run out for a few minutes to grab a few items. But we left everything at home. It was a tense ride. I thought I was prepared, but the plan had been to leave from home. This changed everything. God has a way of doing that.

When we think everything is perfect, that is when trouble often strikes. God does not bring that trouble; it just seems to be the way of the world. But we have often become too content with the way we have set up our lives and with the expectations we have for how things are going to unfold. When these plans get upended, we have a tendency to freak out. I know I did in the labor situation. Thank goodness there are those in our lives that have much cooler heads, that understand our preparation was good, it just

needed to shift. And that plans can go out the window, but your preparation can carry you through. As it has been said, every battle plan goes out the window when the bullets start to fly. (I don't know who said that, but it seems to fit).

1 – How are you preparing for the Day of the Lord?

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2 – What plans do you have that can change and you will still be okay?

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3 – How often have you said that everything is safe and secure and even prosperous?

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4 But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.

Paul needs to remind us we are not in the dark about these things. We won't be surprised; rather, we will be prepared because of the counsel that has been given to us. When Paul is using "you" in this sense, he is talking about those who believe and who live in the day—as opposed to those unbelievers who live in the night.

The contrast of day and night is always interesting when it occurs in scripture. Obviously, day is preferred. When we see Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night (John 3:1-21), Jesus calls him out on it when he talks about how light has come into the world (v.19). He continues that those who do not want to know truth hate the light. So these are themes we have seen before.

Paul clearly states we are not ignorant, or in the dark, about these things. And in that same way, we will not be surprised when the day of the Lord comes. The use of the word "surprised" might be seen a few different ways: 1) To be seized so that one might not escape. 2) To be overtaken. 3) Suffering harm. Truthfully, it might not matter which nuanced translation you use, because Paul has made it clear that you will not be caught this way.

Now, let us make something clear; we don't know when the day of the Lord is coming, but we do know it is coming. I have said this before, but it bears repeating. The true basis of Paul's confidence in the church and

what he was telling them was not because they were so great at looking for signs—in fact, they were not so great at sign-seeing—but rather it was the new birth they had experienced. Because we have been born again, we live in the light, we live in the day, not to be overtaken by the night any longer.

Where was the darkest place you have ever been? Did you feel helpless? What would have helped you not to feel this way? Light! Of course, it would have helped you make it through that darkness. In the same way, our re-birth in Christ is something that shows us the way and prepares us for the day of his coming. We don't even need a great deal of light in order to see. However, what we have been given is the light of the sun, so we walk in darkness no more!

5 For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. 6 So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clear headed.

Do you like being a part of a family? Families can be crazy, can be strange, and can be even annoying. But they are also incredibly supportive, helpful, comforting, and loving. Families are a bit of a two-edged sword. But the truth is, we all want to be in one. And Paul takes a shift in this text to speak to the plural, the community. He is reminding them that they are children, in the same family, of the light and of the day. We used to have another family, the dark, but we don't belong to them anymore. We have been adopted into the light.

Ownership is important. As part of family, especially if you had a brother or a sister, ownership was especially important. You would make sure everyone knew what was yours and what was theirs, and sometimes you wouldn't allow anyone else to touch your stuff. I think God feels the same way about you. You are His! And Paul reminds us of the ownership God has of us. We now belong to Him and not to the darkness and night. Ownership is important, especially when it is God who owns us!

In verse 6, the apostle continues in this vein, but wants to show us the difference between who we are and who they are. He uses an analogy of a military watch, that we might be on guard. The term *En garde* is a French term that literally means "on guard." But it is a warning to someone you are fencing with to be prepared, to be

ready. It is not simply to hold other things suspect, to not trust, but to understand that the game is afoot, and the time to be ready is now. Paul is exhorting the children of the light to be ready for anything. He juxtaposes this readiness with the ill-preparation that those who do not believe have as a general state of being.

The last phrase, "stay alert and be clear headed" is also important. There are a ton of things that can make our heads cloudy, and Paul will speak to at least one of them in the next verse. However, abuse of alcohol is only one thing. I think that the point he is trying to make has more to do with staying focused than anything else. To be "on guard" is to be focused in body, mind and spirit rather than being distracted by all that can distract us on a daily basis. What is interesting is that in this time of digital-only communication, I find myself dreaming of the day when I can sit with someone and have a great cup of coffee or a stimulating conversation. It is too easy to take these things, like being present in someone's life, for granted.

7 Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. 8 But let us who live in the light be clear headed, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

V.7 reiterates some of what was said in the previous two verses. However, he is clarifying that people let their guard down at night, and that is when they can get into trouble. The apostle is essentially saying that because we are in the light, we are protected a bit more from distraction. As well, he illuminates what we have to protect us.

V.8 is the delineation of these tools that we have at our disposal. Before that delineation he wants us to remain “sober” in contrast to the drunkenness of unbelievers. Now, I want to clarify something here. He is less making a statement about clarity than drinking. It would be easy to jump on a bandwagon that says, “See, we should never drink.” That may well be the case, but it is not the point of the scripture. There are other places in scripture that deal with drinking; “a drunkard is a fool. . .” (Proverbs 20:1). If your goal is to teach a tea-totalling way of life, use different texts than this one. This one is speaking to the clarity that keeps us focused on the second coming of Jesus so we do not forget to be prepared.

Then, the author lists the tools I mentioned before. What are they—remember, this is not Ephesians 6:11-12). But it does speak to some of the same things. In Romans, Paul mixed many of the same elements that are found here, as well. We are

to be protected by Faith and Love. Also, the confidence we have in our salvation should be a helmet for us. So let’s break these things down.

1. To be protected by Faith and Love seems very contradictory to what we see in the world today. Especially in times of crisis, we see people “circling the wagons” to take care of themselves and their families. I would never tell people not to protect their families, just to be clear. However, Paul is saying something unique here. He is saying that our greatest protection comes from our faith in Christ, and in the love that engenders in us. That doesn’t sound super protective, I know. However, this is what the Scriptures say, so perhaps we should take it seriously.

2. The next place we need to protect is our heads. That is protected by the confidence we have in the salvation given to us by Jesus. Now, this is interesting. It means that no one can take that confidence away, and when someone tries to, they are really trying to take headshots at us. Those are shots that are meant to kill.

Have you ever had someone tell you that you probably aren’t really saved? I think that is about the worst thing someone can do to another person. It is not only devastating, but it is evil. When we try to take away someone’s confidence in the salvation they have received through Christ, it is the same

as actively working to try and kill someone's hope. Why would anyone do that?

I believe it comes from someone's poor theology. They are not sure they are saved, and therefore they are not willing to allow you to believe that you might be saved either. It is a tragic "misery loves company"

kind of situation, and it speaks to the worst kind of understanding of Christ, his grace, and his salvation for us. Don't listen to those people; they will destroy your confidence in Christ!

1 – Has anyone ever tried to take away the confidence you have in the Cross of Jesus?

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2 – How can we remain confident in these situations?

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3 – What scripture do you look toward to keep yourself clear on what Jesus has done for you?

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9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out His anger on us. 10 Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. 11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

Today I am breaking these verses up one at a time. They are some of the most amazing verses in scripture, and it might be good to take a closer look.

We, as Christians, live with an anticipation of a future salvation, but remember, this is simply the culmination of the good work that God has already begun in us through Christ. And this text reminds us that God's first work, His initiating work through Christ, is the work of salvation and deliverance, not judgment and condemnation. If we could only remember this about Jesus, we would often have a very different outlook on life. This text always reminds me of John 3:16-17 (one text that should not be read without the other)

16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

v.10 reminds us that salvation has been obtained through Jesus Christ, "who died for us. . . that we might live with him." This is Paul's formula for salvation. He makes it clear in so much of his writing to the churches (See Galatians, Romans, Philippians, etc.). But v.10 reminds us of the eschatological (end-time) nature of the

life we will have with him. This gift should inspire obedience and encourage gratitude to such an incredible God. He also reminds us this salvation is for both those who have died and those who are living now. It is the inclusive nature of this text that reminds us that God does not forget those who have gone before us. This should also remind us not to be too myopic in the way that we view our salvation. It is God who judges, but it is also God who saves. Let's make sure we allow God to do both of these tasks in our lives and the lives of others.

Then v.11 concludes with this great admonition of mutual encouragement. This is, again, a theme that Paul picks up in many of his letters. He believes that community is for mutual encouragement, not just in times of crisis, but always. Have you ever wondered why there was so much judgment in church? (Hopefully, this is not your experience.) However, if the main goal of the community of Christ is to share the gospel and to encourage one another, church must be an amazing place to be. If it is not, what are we focusing on, and should we even be a part of something that seeks to tear others down?

1 – Where do you feel the most encouragement?

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2 – How can you help make your community a community that seeks to lift one another up?

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3 – If Christ does not allow his anger to be towards us, should we be afraid of him? Or should we seek to better understand his compassion for us?

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This week has been full of such good news! It is impossible to read these texts and not feel a couple of different emotions: **1)** Assurance that God is for us, and not against us. This is seen through the incredible sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and his promise to come to us again; and **2)** Anticipation. These texts should help us lean into the opportunity we have to live like people who know what lies ahead, and they can't wait to get there. The lives we live now are incredibly important preludes to the life we will lead when Jesus comes. This in no way diminishes the kingdom work we have to do now, but it does remind us that our hope is not in our work, but in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, some people use the second coming as an escape route from the horrors of this life. They see what we do here as unimportant, and they spend their whole lives "preparing" for heaven, but they do this through pious talk, judgment, and seeking perfection. They figure, if they can get it right down here, they will be more accepted up there. There is a thought that the better we are here, the bigger our "crowns" will be in heaven. Inevitably, this perfection is not seen by the love and grace they present to the world, but in the sin they "don't" partake in. It is a purity they seek, but often, a purity without love.

Is purity without love even something to aspire towards? Purity is great, but when we subjugate compassion, mercy, justice, healing and declaring the Lord's favor to purity, it has become an idol, and an idol that has no ability to save us. I have this feeling that Jesus doesn't want us to go to heaven in robes that have never seen any dirt. Rather, I truly believe that he is okay with our robes being soiled and sullied as we work for the kingdom in tangible and powerful ways. We cannot simply walk through this life unattached to the suffering we see in the world. We have to be a force for good, for hope, and for grace, or we have missed the point of it all. Jesus is not interested in how clean you are. He is interested in how engaged you are with the mission he set forth in Luke 4. He wants us to partner with him in the great Co-Mission he has given us to tell the world about his love for them. Verses 9-11 remind us of this so incredibly at the end of this week.

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes, spanning the width of the page.

WEEK 3

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-24 (NLT)

Paul's Final Advice

12 Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. **13** Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.

14 Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

15 See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.

16 Always be joyful. **17** Never stop praying. **18** Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

19 Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. **20** Do not scoff at prophecies, **21** but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. **22** Stay away from every kind of evil.

Paul's Final Greetings

23 Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. **24** God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.

12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Today we learn a new word, “paraenetic.” This word, in British English, relates to a moral and ethical instruction. And this is what Paul is doing at the end of this letter. While we are not done with the series—quite the contrary, we are only in the middle—I wanted us to see that Paul equates much of what he is teaching not simply with the eschatological realities, but also with a moral and ethical code of living. While he has been admonishing the church in Thessalonica to be prepared for and understand what is coming, he also is telling them this as a motivation to live morally and ethically today. His admonition for them to encourage one another, to grow spiritually and more connected, and to be the voice of Christ in the world cannot be diminished. We still live under this paraenetic teaching.

If our eschatology doesn't lead us to better moral and spiritual living today, we are doing it wrong. If all it does is make us scared, make us narcissistic, or create anxiety in us, we were not reading the words of Paul correctly. It is with this understanding we continue to study.

In this first section, he is talking about the fact there are leaders and followers in the church. Now, a quick understanding here is important. Paul would have considered himself a “first follower” of Christ, but he also would have acknowledged that in the following, there is often a call to lead.

Therefore, he is reminding the Church that there are some who lead, and we are to “esteem them highly in love.”

What does this mean practically in today's church? Perhaps it means we are to give grace, understanding, and encouragement to those who are our leaders in the church. I don't say this because of a lack of support in our Crosswalk communities. But I have been less than gracious to our leaders at times. I don't always agree with the choices they make, and I am sure not everyone agree's with the choices that I am tasked to make at Crosswalk church. However, even in the disagreement, I am incredibly blessed by the, mostly, gracious nature of the critique and criticism I receive. As you know, we are in unprecedented times, and I believe we are all learning what it takes to lead, to follow, and to encourage one another through all of this. I am unimaginably blessed by our congregation, our sites, and the larger community as we navigate through times we have never seen before. Thank you for being an amazing group of people, willing to encourage, to grow together, and to create the kind of love that the world needs.

1 – What is a good moral teaching (Paraenetic) that you live by and have for a while?

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2 – Where did it come from? Was it something you found in scripture? Share it on social media today with the hashtag #lovelwell.

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3 – How can you encourage your boss, your pastor, your congressperson, or your spouse today?

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14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Here we find some more admonitions and urgings. The idle seem to be those who have chosen a life of sloth rather than a life of industry for the kingdom. Paul has a particular frustration with those who find nothing to do with themselves. I have often wondered how Paul would do in this distraction-rich world. Paul seemed like someone who was driven by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and wasn't a huge fan of people when they were unwilling to do the work God was calling them to do.

What has God called you to do, and how has that been going? I don't ask this to make anyone feel bad about your call, but rather, to motivate you to look again at what God has for you and wants you to be a part of.

Then he mentions the "fainthearted." Who are the fainthearted? It took a bit of work to discover what was meant by this phrase, as it is a bit out of our vernacular. Some translations use the word "timid" in place of "fainthearted," but I am not sure this is the greatest translation. Timid is really used in place of "those who are discouraged," which I believe to be the best parallel in the English language. In other words, it is a reiteration of what was previously mentioned, that we should encourage one another. But this is with a particular emphasis on those who are already discouraged. We all know the

"glass is half empty" kind of people. And this may have been the "is there even a glass?" kind of people. There will always be those in our community that need to be encouraged a bit more than others, just because of their worldview and outlook on life. Paul wants us to remember these people as well. They are often forgotten because they have a tendency to be negative, even in the best of times.

Paul wants us to help the weak and be patient with them all. I wonder if Paul struggled with these types of people, and that is why he mentions them specifically. They seem to be a bit different in personality than he is, and perhaps this is why he wants us to remember them, as he sometimes struggled to create positive interactions with them. I am conjecturing, of course, but I find myself struggling with some of these types of people as well. This does not mean they don't need encouragement, but sometimes it is harder to encourage them as they seem to repel this type of counsel.

1 – How do you minister to those who see the world in a different way than you do?

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2 – When someone is negative, does it frustrate you?

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3 – Taking Paul’s counsel into account, what can you do to encourage these people in your life? Maybe write down who they are and work out a strategy.

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16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

"The inner life shapes the outer attitudes..." (The New American Commentary; 1 and 2 Thessalonians).

That is so true. Commentators are a bit divided on where these things lie. Are they part of our inner faith life, or are they external expressions of our faith? It seems to me they are both of these things. Whether our prayers are internal or external, they are expressions of our connection with God. As well, joy and our ability to rejoice externally come from a clear understanding of what God has done for us, our connection with Him, and our ability to live with gratitude for everything God has given us.

These admonitions are such great reminders of how to live within the boundaries and blessings that God has given us through Jesus Christ. So how do we do it?

How do we rejoice always? I think it comes from acknowledging the goodness of God in all our circumstances. All of the circumstances? Even what we are experiencing right now? Even the social and physical distancing, the staying away from work and church? How can we rejoice in these circumstances?

I think we have to recognize that things actually could get worse, and sometimes they do. I am blessed to work with Faith-driven healthcare professionals at times, and I try to remind them that they are not simply in the healthcare business, but rather, in the

hope business. People don't always make it out of the hospital, but they can even pass away with the hope in Jesus we are able to instill in them. What a blessing it is to be able to see beyond the pale, into the great and wide unknown, and know that Jesus will carry us through no matter what. Perhaps that is the beginning of Joy.

This does not diminish difficult circumstances. In fact, this allows for them. I think that is why Paul mentions prayer without ceasing right after he mentions we should rejoice. We can rejoice, while we pray through difficult and painful circumstances. In fact, it might be the only reason why we can rejoice always. Our constant connection with God is the thing that allows for joy, allows for gratitude, and allows for a deep sense of calling in our lives.

Do you remember the last time you left your cell phone at home? There is a sense of loss when that happens, because you are not connected in the way you have become used to. Prayer is our connection with God, and with it comes a great deal of joy and gratitude. Without it, we seem lost, especially when crisis comes. We can make it through anything with Jesus, and it is so amazing that it is his will for us to understand all of this together.

1 – What are you grateful for today?

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2 – How can this give you joy?

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3 – How can you express joy for what God has given you right now? Make this tangible in your life.

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19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies,

These seem out of place. But they are not. The early church didn't have a complete canon (set of scriptures). The Holy Spirit was out there simply doing what it does, and there were itinerant preachers all over the place claiming this truth and that truth about God. It would have been hard to know what leader to follow, what prophecies should be listened to, and which ones were false prophecies. There were misconceptions, incongruencies, and even some actual disagreements. Some of these disagreements were local (3 John, 1 Corinthians 1:10-17), while others, like what we saw in Acts 15, actually affected the whole church.

These first two exhortations are negative, and the rest are positive. These exhortations are warning us about becoming so cynical that we stop the work of the Holy Spirit. We are not to allow ourselves to quench what God is doing.

My daughter, Hannah, has always been amazing, but quite a handful. I never thought I would have to tell someone to "stop licking the wall!" I can remember one time when we told her "No" and she said "or what?" She was probably about three years old at the time. We learned pretty quickly we were going to have to be amazingly adept at parenting to help her stay in line, but not to quench her spWirit. That was the fear we had. We knew she was going to be an incredible person, but

if we broke her spirit, she wouldn't be the person we love so much today. That was a fine line. I don't know that we did it too well, but she has maintained her personality and also has become more thoughtful and wise.

In the same way, we don't want to stop the work of the Holy Spirit, but we do want to be wise when it comes to what the Spirit is really doing. We don't want to say there is no prophecy, but we also don't want to be taken any which way by anything someone says. We have to find the balance between the work of the Holy Spirit and the prophetic words that God does place on people's hearts.

Luckily, the next text will begin to express how this is possible. We need to be a people who are open to the Spirit's leadings and who are also anticipating the prophetic words that God gives, but are discerning enough to know when something is not of God or simply not right. How do we do this?

1 – What are your first thoughts on this? Does the Holy Spirit still work? If so, how?

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2 – What do you think about new prophetic words? Would or could God still send them?

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3 – What makes us hesitant to believe that God is still doing some of these acts?

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20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good.

So how do you deal with prophecies so you don't dismiss them out of hand, which is what the Greek structure indicates? You test everything said by the tests of a prophet. There are four tests of a prophet that can be considered: 1. They must confess and uplift Jesus. (1 John 4:1-2); 2. It must harmonize with scripture. (Isaiah 8:20); 3. It must yield good fruit. (Matthew 7:15); and 4. Prophecies must come to pass. (Jeremiah 28:9).

He also states that we should hold fast to what is good. This reminds me of a ship in the storm that is trying to get its anchor to hold fast unto something so the sailors might not be lost to the turbulent sea. They want the anchor to "hold fast" or to secure itself to what is good. Now, this is interesting because it doesn't say to reject or accept all things from any given prophet; rather, it seems to give us some room for discernment on those things that a prophet might say. The reason this is so interesting is that there are times when prophets say some interesting things. We don't really believe there are any new prophets; however, we do believe there are times when people do speak prophetically. As a pastor, I am at times called to speak prophetically to my congregation.

Does it seem like I am taking a place amongst the biblical prophets? No, of course not, and no one should hold their words up to scripture as if they would have been included if they were around in those days. That

is heresy. However, if we broaden our understanding of prophecy from future-telling and move it to include the voice of direction for a group of people, then we begin to see what many of the Old Testament prophets were doing. You see, a prophet throws the ball ahead of the congregation, like a quarterback, in order for them to run to catch up. The prophetic voice looks ahead and helps navigate and guide a congregation through difficult times, through changes in course, and through the difficult conversations about trajectory and identity. It is not simply telling the future, it is helping a congregation or people group move toward a better, more God-led future. We have forgotten about the Old Testament prophets that called out Israel for their lack of compassion, love and willingness to care for the most vulnerable. The only future telling they were involved in was "God is not pleased, and that is not a good place to be."

So we are not to despise prophecy, but we are also to have a discerning mind and heart when we hear words that push us in one direction or another. The good news is that with the tests of a prophet, we can discern what should be listened to and what should be forgotten.

1 – What do you think prophecy is?

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2 – What is your favorite prophet to read about in the Old Testament?

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3 – What does this do to your idea of what a “Prophetic” voice should be?

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22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may 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.

In verse 21, we saw the shift from negative exhortations to positive exhortations, that we test all and hold onto those things that are good. In v. 22, we are asked to abstain from all that is evil, in all its forms.

That's worth unpacking. What are all the forms of evil? Surely, it is too many to list. And the facts are that most of us won't be involved in the most egregious forms of evil. The word in Greek that is used is the "appearance" of evil. Now, it would be easy to assume this word means we shouldn't "look" like we are doing evil, but if we are in our hearts, that is not the issue. However, the nuance in the translation seems to lean towards a deeper understanding of what is evil. This means that we are to abstain, or stay away from, every form of evil that the community considered evil. Remember, we are dealing with a 1st century, pagan world. So some of their definitions of evil would be a bit different than ours. For a list of what was considered evil, you can always look to Romans, chapter 1. However, when you do, be prepared to look at a long list that includes things like lust, gossip, and disobeying your parents.

I think it is important to remember that intent has a lot to do with what is evil. If we remember that evil intent can make good things bad, we can begin to conform

our lives into the greater, and not the lesser things.

Then verse 23 and 24 reminds us that this is all really about God; His sanctification is what will ultimately cleanse us. And remember, He is truly that which is faithful, and according to this text, He will keep us from all evil.

If we can refocus these texts from ourselves to Jesus, which is what happens in these final two texts, we can remember how we are to do our theological musing. We keep it focused on God. It is easy to read this week's texts and think about what we are admonished to do and to be. However, the final two verses remind us that it is God who makes things happen for us, and it is God who can create the difference in how we live our lives. Paul has a way of bringing things back to the right and true focus, that which is Jesus Christ, as opposed to our very inward and behavioral thinking.

1 – When you heard, “abstain from evil in all its forms,” were you nervous you might not be able to do that?

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2 – What are different forms of evil that you struggle with? Refer to Romans 1:18ff for a list.

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3 – Were you relieved when you realized that it is God who helps us stay away from evil?

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The texts this week take us from the love and respect we are to give to our spiritual leaders, to some wise and sage words about how we are to function in life, to a promise that it is God who will ultimately sanctify in the end. It is a broad and roaming text that is meant to encourage, exhort, teach, and ultimately grow our faith in Jesus, who is the one who holds all things together and motivates, inspires, and encourages us.

It is easy to look at Paul's writings at times and feel discouraged by his exhortations of us as people of faith. It is like he is constantly showing us a target that we can't quite seem to hit. His paraenetic, or his moral teachings, are at times frustrating for us who don't seem to hit our targets. However, remember, moral teachings are both inspirational and aspirational. What I mean by "aspirational" is that they are meant to be what we live towards, even if we are missing the mark. They remind us to reach for something both moral and life-giving. These exhortations are less commands and more counsel. As we seek to grow, to become the people that God has created us to be, we engage in the process of being inspired and working aspirationally toward these goals.

Life is messy, no matter what the circumstances. As we live our lives, we seek to progress and move toward a particular direction. Without something to aspire towards, we will definitely miss every mark, mainly because we don't have any.

A good example of this is our mothers! From the very beginning, moms have this amazing way of helping us in a good direction. Sometimes it is with a firm hand, and other times it is with the aspirational influence they have over us. It is pretty telling how important they are to us, how moving their words and feelings about us are, and how we listen when they speak because they are simply MOM. This title holds high esteem in all of our hearts, and that doesn't really change.

Paul's words have this kind of aspirational staying power to us who call ourselves Christians. We don't so much seek his approval as we seek to listen to his influence for both inspiration and aspiration. It is easy to become discouraged because we don't always do what we hope to do, but Paul speaks to that in the book of Romans, as well, in both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. Paul knows we will falter, he knows we will fail, and he knows how gracious and forgiving God is. He made it his life's work to recognize and share the fact that God is for us and not against us. Perhaps it would do us well to focus on also giving that message to the world. This is not just an "end time" message, but an "all time" message!

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

WEEK 4

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-12 (NLT)

Encouragement during Persecution

3 Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing. **4** We proudly tell God's other churches about your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering. **5** And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering. **6** In his justice he will pay back those who persecute you.

7 And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, **8** in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. **9** They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. **10** When he comes on that day, he will receive glory from his holy people—praise from all who believe. And this includes you, for you believed what we told you about him.

11 So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do. **12** Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of the way you live, and you will be honored along with him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.

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.

Even in the shortest letter, Paul always greets the church he was writing to and for, and this is no different. He spent the first two verses greeting the people of Thessalonica, and now he is giving thanksgiving and prayer in these next two verses. These particular verses are a bit unique in the respect that they include Paul's sense of obligation to the church. He says "we ought," which sounds a bit like a sense of duty. The reason for this was because of their faith, the way it was growing, and the way he was able to boast about them to other people.

This particular wording has caused some commentators to question whether or not this book was authored by Paul the Apostle; however, it would take more words than this simple phrase to carry this question through. More so, it could be we see Paul using these words as a response to 1 Thessalonians 2 where he has been made out to be one who flatters the church, perhaps a bit more than he ought. By these words of obligation he is letting them know that he is not giving them empty praise, but rather, praise they deserve because of their increasing faith, love and abundance toward one another. His praise is well deserved.

There is an interesting construct hap-

pening here that might be worth mentioning. He uses the word "faith" to express their commitment to Christ, and the word "love" as their commitment to one another. You remember the words of Jesus that remind us that to "love God" and "Love one another" fulfills the law (John 13:34-35). But Paul goes a bit further by expressing their love for one another as "increasing." Paul is proud of them for "lovingwell" and continuing to increase that love beyond just their congregation.

And because of this, he boasts about their love in all the other churches he visits and works. He boasts not simply to the other churches, but his colleagues in the work boast of the Thessalonian church because of their "perseverance" in the suffering and affliction they were experiencing. This echoes the prayer of thanks in the first book of Thessalonians where Faith, Love and Hope were emphasized. Hope can be seen as perseverance in the midst of suffering. Paul places more emphasis here on the "seeing through" their afflictions. He is impressed and certainly empathetic to what they will suffer, as he has suffered greatly for the gospel.

What are you having to persevere through? As I write these words, we are heading into what may be the worst 2-3

weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic. We expect the numbers to rise in the US to unprecedented proportions; we are also expecting the death toll to rise to frightening numbers. Currently they are setting up temporary morgues at ice skating rinks to keep the bodies cold as they will need more space for those who succumb to this virus.

Writing this is surreal. A few weeks ago we couldn't have imagined that we would be here. It is scary, and we are learning to live with a fear we haven't experienced before. We can't simply say that everything is going to be fine and go on with life. This is no longer something that is happening to someone else. It is happening to us, to our parents, our

friends, our colleagues. We are experiencing the collapse of an economy we thought might be invincible.

I don't say all this to scare anyone. I say this to remind you there have been people who in the midst of great suffering were worth boasting about. And this boasting is coming from someone who has been through a great deal of suffering himself. What would the apostle say about us who are connected to Crosswalk?

If this were a letter to Crosswalk—let's call this second letter 2 Crosswalk—what would Paul say about us in the midst of our opportunity to suffer?

1 – What would you want people to know about your faith in the midst of this crisis?

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2 – Do you think Paul would talk about your faith, hope, and love?

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3 – How can you tangibly express your faith today? What will you pray for? How will you serve others?

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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,

Paul is elaborating here. He has such great hopes for this church. And “with all this evidence” of God’s favor for them because of the continued work of the kingdom, for which they are suffering, it just makes sense that they would be worth boasting about.

Do you know what the Greek word for judgment is? *Krisis*. Now, I know this might sound bad, but it is actually not necessarily a negative concept; rather, it can be viewed as a positive, as well. Judgments can be favorable to those who are judged also. And in this context, the judgment is in the favor of the Thessalonians because of their faith, hope and love for one another. So in this case, not only is the judgment of God correct or right, but it is also incredibly good news. So good that they were willing to suffer for it.

When we think of God’s judgment, it is really easy to quickly be worried about which way it is going to go for us. And if you grew up in the church, chances are you got pretty comfortable with feeling bad about the judgment of God in your life. In all honesty, I remember having a pretty bad dream about having to walk across a room with, I think, mousetraps on all sides of me and watching all my friends get smacked with the mousetraps and me being afraid to move because I figured it would be me next. I know that might sound silly, but it was part and parcel of the narrative given to me.

God is waiting to judge you, and judgment means bad things.

However, the more I read scripture, the more it seems to tell us that God’s judgment, which is always correct because God is judging on a very different set of metrics than we have a tendency to understand, is not something to be afraid of but something to be welcomed. Why welcome judgment? Because judgment goes both ways. Have you ever had a judge rule in your favor? I have, and it is a great feeling. (Before anyone gets worried, it was for traffic tickets when I was 17 years old!) When a judgment goes in your direction, there is no better feeling.

Paul’s comment to the Thessalonians is that God is for them, not against them. And he drives it home by making the counter-argument, about those who are against will also be judged. This is perhaps not such good news for them, as they are out of God’s favor, at least according to Paul.

1 – When was a time when judgment went in your favor?

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2 – Elaborate on how you felt when the judgment went your way!

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3 – How can you make sure people know how much God is for them, so they won't fear judgment?

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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.

So God repays those who afflict others, but will also give rest and relief to those who are afflicted. This idea of rest has some eschatological connotations. (It seems like it is talking about the end of time rest, that both Paul and the Thessalonians will take together). He doesn't use these words to mean the end time rest of heaven anywhere else in his writings, so these verses are not often included in the discussion of end times in 2 Thessalonians.

There is an interesting discussion about these texts, of which I am no expert. However, it seems that the Thessalonians had a mistaken understanding about the "day of the Lord" or judgment. It is thought that perhaps because of their current suffering, at the time of Paul's letter, and because they knew they were going to suffer more, some of them seemed to think that God's judgment, or the "day of the Lord," had already come. Perhaps they had received a misleading word of prophecy or a letter that had added to the confusion. Paul is wanting to disavow them of this understanding.

Have you ever gone through a time of deep trouble that felt as if perhaps it was a reckoning from God? We sometimes transfer our feelings of suffering onto God in order to make some sense of the suffering we are going through. It is possible, although

not stated, that the Thessalonian church was feeling this way and simply thought it must be in God's plan that they suffer. And this is either judgment from God or the sign of the coming of the Lord, and therefore, the "day of the Lord" must be here.

It seems reasonable. We often look for signs to see what it is we are going through. I know we have talked about signs a bit, and so I won't belabor the point, but I do wonder what signs have you thought about when it comes to knowing what God is doing in your life. How do you see God working, and how do you know it is God? What are your anchor points that pull you away from being twisted and turned by so-called "answers" to prophecy and "signs of the times"?

But there is one sign we should be always connected to, that one sign of unreasonable love that connects us, grounds us, and teaches us what love truly is. That sign is the Cross of Jesus Christ, his resurrection, and the ever-present sign of the Holy Spirit working tirelessly in our lives. It is easy to look at world events, at plagues and earthquakes and believe that the "day of the Lord" has come. But even as Paul was teaching the Thessalonians, we should understand that Judgment is for us, not against, because of Jesus, and so we can quell the anxiety in our hearts.

It is more than fair to acknowledge that we are living in strange and unprecedented times, and I am hoping by this point we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. (As I write this, before the Easter weekend, we are going into the worst

few weeks anticipated for California, I am actively praying for us all.) But it is also more than fair—in fact, it is our deep and abiding hope—that Jesus is more than enough for all of us through this time.

1 – What “signs of the times” have you seen lately?

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2 – What is it teaching you about trusting in Jesus?

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3 – What can you do to help someone with “eschatological anxiety” today?

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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.

So these are pretty rough verses. I don't think that anyone who calls themselves Christian can be happy with the idea of suffering and punishment for those who decide to not believe in Jesus after every opportunity has been given. If we have any compassion, any love, and any desire for mercy, we can't be happy about judgment that goes in the wrong direction for them, and we can't ever say "they got what they deserved."

I mean this. To watch anyone choose to move away from God is to watch someone choose to live in "hell on earth." Why can I say that? If destruction is moving away from the "presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might," then anyone who decides to step away from Jesus is already living in what Paul would describe as punishment. And even though they chose it, it should not give us any happiness or glee to watch them experience the loneliness of losing God in their lives.

I know it is easy to say, "Well, it was their choice," and leave it at that. They are victims of their own choices, and so we don't have to feel bad. And while some of this is true, we still have empathy and compassion for those who have been hurt by the church, missed the opportunity to worship with great people, and feel as if they have been

judged by those who call themselves Christians. The truth is, sometimes we are worse than those who leave faith, because we have driven them out. While this is usually not our desire, we sometimes become so myopic as to feel like if they are different from us, they don't really believe in God. This is one of the worst things we can do, and we must check ourselves daily to make sure we are giving people the best view of God they can find, and certainly, the most love.

I asked the church a few years ago why the members brought people to church. It was a serious question. If the church is not the place where people will be the most loved, then we shouldn't bring people to it. Whatever church you attend, it must be working hard to become the place of light and life and love to the world. We sometimes think we need to let go of love for truth, but if they don't exist together, then we have missed the point of truth completely.

Truth without love sends people away from God. Love will lead us to truth. Start with love, and in your desire to love God more, he will lead you to the truth about him found in scripture.

1 – Have you ever found yourself happy when someone “gets what they deserve?”

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2 – What can you do to move away from those feelings and move closer to love?

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3 – How can love lead you to truth?

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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,

“To this end” is actually a better way of saying “with this in mind,” which was the typical translation for a long time. The reason that was a bit confusing is that Paul wasn’t just talking about what he had just said, he was “keeping in mind” their faithfulness, which he had spoken of before. So to translate it with “to this end” means it is not what was just previously said, but rather, the culmination of what he has been saying. It is a broader and less specific term. But what he had been keeping in his mind was them. He had been “constantly” keeping them in his mind, in his heart, and therefore he is praying for them that God would give them strength to do what he was asking of them.

Have you prayed for someone “constantly?” What is that like? Is that person a constant worry, and that is why you need to pray for them? Or are they close to your heart, so this is the reason you are praying for them so often? Or do you view prayer as an ongoing conversation with God which doesn’t stop, but goes on and on as long as you breathe and live and think? What is prayer to you, and how can you keep it constant?

When you begin to realize that prayer is a position you take in life, not simply physically, but as a commitment to maintaining an open line with God, prayer takes on a very different place in your life. Here is a good example: When we started the Crosswalk Chattanooga Campus, we were pretty

serious about communicating, and so we started a group text chat with the whole leadership team. This was about eight people at first; however, it has grown far beyond that number. No matter how many people we add or subtract, the conversation is constant. I often wake up to a great number of texts by amazing people doing the will of God every single day. The most fascinating thing to me is the fact these people do not talk about the program exclusively. The vast majority of the conversation has to do with how they, as a leadership team, can take care of each and every person who walks through their door. How they can be affective in reaching out to the community, how they grow the kingdom of God through their work and lives, and how they can support one another, grow together, and even help us out in Redlands.

They can only do this work by having faith in Christ and having access to his power. The constant conversation keeps us all in the position to be ready to respond. And this is what constant prayer is like. I am so grateful for the conversation with Chattanooga’s leadership team, but I am more grateful for the conversation with my God, each and every day, constantly.

1 – What is prayer to you?

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2 – How do you get into a position of prayer?

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3 – Who do you have in your life with whom you can communicate constantly?

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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.

So why all these prayers? So that the name of the Lord Jesus may be glorified in you. It is pretty simple. To glorify a name is to praise or enhance the reputation of someone. So when you are doing those good works that he has set you out to do, and given you the wisdom and strength to accomplish, you are also growing his reputation. When you love with reckless abandon, when you do unreasonable things in order to make Jesus known in the world through your love, you are actually helping God's reputation in the world.

Do you remember when reputation was a huge deal for you? That emphasis usually peaks in high school. However, we still need to maintain a decent reputation for work and for family. When our kids do something great, it enhances our reputations as parents. When they do poorly, we feel that as well. While we were probably most concerned about our reputations in high school, today our reputations are still important to us.

Yelp has made a whole economy out of this. The amount of stars next to a restaurant's name makes the decision easier for my wife and me on our date nights. Less than 4? Maybe not. How many reviewers? How many are certified? All types of things play into the economy of reputation that help us make the decisions. Without knowing these things, we would just have to go by instinct on whether or not the food was good, the at-

mosphere was decent, and if we should eat there or not.

So what is your reputation? Better yet, what does God think of you? I ask this question because probably the most important person who knows us is God, and when we realize this and realize that he has a vested interest in our reputation, it is not because he needs our help, but because his reputation is tied deeply to ours. What people think of us as Christians is often what they think of God. Perhaps this was why Paul was so happy with the Thessalonians. They were representing God so well that judgment was not scary, that the "day of the Lord" was a day of rejoicing, and he knew they would make it through everything that was being thrown at them.

How do your words glorify God? How can you grow his reputation through what you do today?

I have thought a bit about my gravestone. I know that might be morbid, but I really want it to say something like "faithful father, husband, follower." I want my life to glorify God with every breath, with every conversation, and with every action. I make mistakes, but I make them honestly. God can use that, I know, because he does use this foolish person to tell others about Jesus. When we recognize we have a role to play in the reputation of God, everything becomes a bit more interesting...

1 – What can you do today to build god’s reputation in the world?

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2 – What is the greatest gift you can give someone?

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3 – How can you share how great God is with someone today?

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It's a big week in the love and judgment of God. And I want to be honest. I sort of swept through some of the results of a judgment not going your way. If you are afflicting the afflicted, then it does not go well, and there are some descriptions included in this week that people don't really like. I sure don't.

What does it mean to afflict the afflicted? There are a ton of different ways we might express it, but during this pandemic, I think it is those who are profiteering, gouging other people for goods and services that would normally not cost so much. Also, I have heard of those going door-to-door acting like federal officials and getting information from people in order to steal their identities. People are preying on others' fears and it is tragic and just evil. Perhaps Paul is allowing his personal feelings to get the best of him, and he, at his darkest moments, is wanting to see justice served.

But I want to make it abundantly clear, we do not come from a faith tradition which believes that God is willing to make people suffer for eternity for a limited amount of sin on earth. This is a much greater and more detailed conversation, but simply put, they are "destroyed forever," but not "forever destroyed." That is a very specific difference. In v.9 it says "eternal destruction" not "destruction eternally," and this is great news.

It is great news because it speaks to the character of God, how he is not willing to make people suffer forever. I am glad we have a God who is like this, unwilling to

create eternal suffering. However, it does not mean that judgment against people is not forever; it is, but it is not forever suffering. (A great resource to study this more is a book called "A Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment"—Edward Fudge. Or you can watch the movie "Hell and Mr. Fudge," which tells the story of writing this book. It's a great place to start).

Why bring this up at all? Because we need to understand not just how God saves eternally, but how we deal with the idea of eternal punishment as well. The GREAT news is that we don't have to suffer any destruction at all if we simply accept Jesus as our creator, sustainer, and savior. This is the impetus for telling people and loving people into an understanding of Jesus. I don't want anyone to be lost. I want them all to discover the incredible joy of loving and being loved by Jesus. The church exists to continue the great Co-Mission (John 28:19-20) of telling the world about God, with God!

The gift of Grace we have received from God is not something to be kept, but to be shared. I know it sounds intimidating at times to share God with someone, but truly, it doesn't have to be. Everything that you do and leave undone is your witness. The label "Christian" is as much a verdict the world places on you as it is a label we like to give ourselves. If Jesus is in you, then people will know him through knowing you. Of course it is a great responsibility, but it is also a great opportunity. Don't shy away from it!

Here are some questions to go along with this week's sermon:

- 1 – What have you thought about judgment over the years?
- 2 – Has reading these texts changed your idea of judgment from God?
- 3 – How has God judged in your favor in the past?
- 4 – What have you thought about Hell and eternal torment?
- 5 – How can a God who loves you enough to come and die for you allow you to be tortured forever?
- 6 – What can you do to let someone know how much God loves them today?
- 7 – Has fear ever made you do something you wouldn't normally do?
Be honest.
- 8 – How can we explain to people about the "good news" of God's judgment?
- 9 – Have you ever had a judgment not go in a friend's favor and found a bit of joy in it?
Again, be honest.
- 10– What do you think "forever judgment" will look like?

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WEEK 5

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-17 (NLT)

Events prior to the Lord's Second Coming

1 Now, dear brothers and sisters, let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. **2** Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us. **3** Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. **4** He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.

5 Don't you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you? **6** And you know what is holding him back, for he can be revealed only when his time comes. **7** For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way. **8** Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, but the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming.

9 This man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles. **10** He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them. **11** So God will cause them to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies. **12** Then they will be condemned for enjoying evil rather than believing the truth.

Believers Should Stand Firm

13 As for us, we can't help but thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by the Lord. We are always thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth. **14** He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, **17** comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.

Now, dear brothers and sisters, let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. 2 Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us. 3 Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. 4 He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.

We are in it now!! We jump into these texts and immediately see Paul explaining the events that will take place before the day of the Lord. Paul has a few things to emphasize in these texts, and we will break them down, but 400 words on these texts is going to be difficult. These kinds of scriptures have a tendency to need some significant explanation. Before we get to the explanation, I really want you to understand the context this is given.

It seems the church in Thessalonica was not only concerned about what would happen at the end of all things, as they were having friends pass away, but in this second letter Paul was beginning to correct teaching that had somehow made its way into the church having to do with the "Day of the Lord." They must have been experiencing that "eschatological anxiety" that many of us have come to know so profoundly over the last few months. It seems they may have reached out to him because they wanted

answers, and they were being given answers that Paul thought he needed to correct. As well, it was important to Paul to have them understand it was not coming from him, as apparently, some of the teachers were claiming authority from Paul. Paul clarifies this in verse 2 in no uncertain terms.

In ancient rhetoric, or conversation and dialogue, it would have been appropriate for the writer to put his topic right at the beginning, which is exactly what Paul does. He wants to calm their anxiety and fear that was exacerbated by some false teaching, specifically about if the "day of the Lord" had already come.

In verse 2 he mentions they should not become shaken or unsettled (alarmed) because of this teaching. One of the Greek words used (saluethena i) literally means to become unmoored, like a boat becomes unhooked from its anchor due to the pressure of the storm. It is such an illustrative term, and people reading this letter would have caught the reference. They were living

in storm, they were living in chaos, and they were afraid of losing anchor. Unfortunately, there are those among us who would add to the chaos by misinterpreting scripture, by choosing not to use their discernment, or by simply adding to the noise with what they choose to share. If you are looking for chaos and fear, it is never far away. Paul is writing to calm that fear they were experiencing and was being built up by the false teaching.

This false teaching is still around today, and it ratchets up the anxiety of everyone who sees it. Without an anchor point to know whether or not things are true, we can easily become “unmoored” in a raging sea.

V. 3 and 4 need to be dealt with as well, so we are going to have to go long on this explanation, I hope that is okay. Verse 3 introduces a couple of concepts; 1) The day of the Lord has not happened yet, and will not until a few things occur. 2) Someone is going to create the chaos and rebellion. (The man of lawlessness)

So here we go: These next few verses are really complex and long, so stay with me. It seems the intent of the author is to list events that refute the teaching of the day of the Lord having already arrived. But directly after this admonition, in the refutation, there is a character introduced with four terms or titles. There is one that is most familiar, “the man of lawlessness.” But the other ideas are that the man is doomed to destruction

(son of destruction--on one whose destiny is ruin), then Enemy, and the Climber—or the one who will exalt himself over...God. Those are pretty serious titles.

Now that we have a character to pin our fears on, we usually want to immediately figure out who this guy is. If we figure this out, then we will be more prepared for the end of all things. However, let’s take a moment and breathe. Historically, we have pinned this term or like terms on those emperors and rulers who have made themselves God-like in demanding divine deference from their people. Antiochus Epiphanes has often been a prototype for the anti-christ. As well, emperor Gaius (Caligula), Pompey, Domitian, many Popes, and the like over the years have been called many of these names. I don’t say this to diminish the work of so many to see who this man or many men are, however, perhaps what this shows us is that these prophecies have been fulfilled by many people over the years, and I would bet, we will find some in our contemporary lives that might fit the mold as well. I don’t think Paul was looking to hang this on a particular person, but was trying to get those in Thessalonica to understand how things would go down. Remember, this was meant to calm their eschatological anxiety. So let’s not read ahead too far into history at this point.

5 Don't you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you? 6 And you know what is holding him back, for he can be revealed only when his time comes. 7 For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way. 8 Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, but the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming.

Paul continues in this vein. He reminds them that they have had this conversation before. Have you ever forgotten important conversations that might change the way you look at the world? I find myself reading so much, having so many conversations, that sometimes, I forget those things that would calm the biggest fears in my life. I have a friend who I love to have conversations with. And early on, I noticed he would take notes in our conversation. I finally got up the nerve to ask him why, and he told me that they were always filled with such good information, he didn't want to forget. I had never seen someone take notes on just a conversation before. I think I understand it a great deal more at this point in my life.

He reminds them they know what holds this "man of lawlessness" back, and he does it personally. This is a parenthetical statement where he interjects some personality. He obviously feels sort of responsible that they are not heeding or remembering his teaching.

It is important for us to have some humility here. Church history has been littered with incautious, self-confident, but mistaken attempts to find in Paul's text a

reference to some contemporary event, person, or personality. This should be a warning to us to become more cautious and even tentative than others and even we have been in the past. However, we have to continue to work through these texts as they are an important part of scripture.

Rebellion against God is the real point to this text right now. Paul agrees that this is something that is already happening, there is a lawlessness that is present, but not in its totality. However, it is being held back by a restrainer, or a godly force that limits the influence of evil. So who is holding

back that power? A good guess would be the Holy Spirit. However, due to the structure and the language used, it is possible what is holding back the chaos is the chaos (or man of lawlessness). There is a deep ambiguity to the text. This reminds us that we should continue in the humility of understanding we don't know everything.

The text then goes on to say that there will be a revealing at the proper time. This doesn't make this text less confusing. If it is a force for good that holds back the chaos, great, but if it is chaos that holds back the chaos then we are sort of in the same boat, but it will get much worse.

Whew! This stuff is confusing, and I am paraphrasing and really trying to make things a bit more simple.

So let me probably oversimplify things. Verse 8 immediately reminds us while there will be some ascension of this evil, even to the point where he will have people worship

him, his glory will be fleeting, because Jesus will “overthrow” him with “the breath of his mouth.” Paul is echoing Isaih 11:44, which says that the descendant of Jesse will “with the breath of his lips will slay the wicked”.

In short: Jesus Wins.

1 – These are difficult passages, is it easier to focus on the negative or the positive we see in them? Why?

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2 – How can we be sure we haven’t missed the “Day of the Lord?”

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3 – If Jesus wins, why are we even talking about this at all?

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9 This man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles. 10 He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them. 11 So God will cause them to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies. 12 Then they will be condemned for enjoying evil rather than believing the truth.

Well, it seems like evil will have its day. We know it won't be for long, but there seems to be a recognition that people will be deceived and believe the lies that are being told by this person, this evil. There is this recognition that there will be counterfeit power, and signs and wonders. All of these terms were used about the ministry of Jesus. Peter actually used these words in Acts 2:22 at his sermon at Pentecost. Interestingly, Paul uses these words to validate the gospel, as the evil will use these same things that Jesus did, albeit counterfeit, in order to prove his worth.

Paul makes such a strong argument for the pervasiveness of this deceptive power, that the church will know it. And this becomes a problem, because the church has been wrong about the end of time and the identity of this lawless man for a long while now. Paul didn't think it necessary to explain more, due to the fact he had spoken with them at length while he was there with them.

This is too bad for us, as we could really use a bit more of an explanation.

However, have I mentioned it before; Jesus Wins.

Paul says they will reject the truth, and by truth he seems to mean gospel. Once we reject the gospel, the only thing to do is to trust in that which is false. Paul is giving us such a strong reason to stand against deception.

Now, I'd like to be pastoral for a moment. These are hard texts, they can be scary, and they can make us feel like we won't know that we are being deceived. However, let me be clear. You know the gospel, and it can't be taken away from you. I want to reiterate what it is again:

God loved you so much that he was willing to come and die for you, as a human, while retaining his divinity. He died, rose again, and ascended into heaven where he waits to come back for you again. You have been given this by an act of grace, not because you deserved it for any other reason than you are the object of his love. Now, we live our lives in response to this love.

The lie is twofold that we have to be aware of:

1. That God has no power over evil, what he did on the cross wasn't quite enough, and that evil will ultimately win.

2. That God doesn't really love you so much that he will protect you and come back to save you to be with him forever.

When those questions come into our hearts, when those doubts are allowed to infect our thoughts, it means we are beginning to forget how faithful God is to us. Satan would have you think God is not big enough, loving enough, powerful enough, or present enough to save us.

That is a lie from the depths of hell. Do not believe it.

Unfortunately, when we take our eyes off of Jesus on the Cross or Jesus emerging from the grave and we put our eyes on the evil around us, like Peter, we begin to drown in the waves. Chaos is like that . If you have ever been in a real storm while on the ocean, you know what this is like. It is so easy to lose our calm, to panic, and to think it will all be lost. But Jesus is your anchor, he is your mooring, don't lose him.

1 – Who wins?

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2 – Why do you think evil will have its day?

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3 – How can we protect our hearts and heads?

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13 As for us, we can't help but thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by the Lord. We are always thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth. 14 He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When you read this, do you have a sense of relief? I know I do. I will tell you the truth. As we read all of this in our Pandemic time of life, I am finding myself fighting the darkness that is out there.

When scripture affirms something it is powerful, but when the harder parts of scripture seem affirmed it can create a lot of fear. I have so many people sending me their versions of truth they have found on the internet, their conspiracy theories, their deep sense of dread, they share it all. I feel for them. I cry for them. And I weep for their inability to see the greater narrative that we know to be true, that God loves you and is for you.

Perhaps it is easy to give Satan so much power in our lives because we want to be those people who found the hidden or secret truth that no one wants to talk about. Literally, I have 5 or 6 videos that have that title. We are willing to sacrifice the security of the gospel to be the ones who have figured it all out. I wonder, do the people who send me those things ever look into the motivation of those who have created these kinds of media? What is their agenda, is it of God? Why are these people who create this stuff willing to give so much credit to Satan?

Oh, I know what people will say, "Pastor Tim, you are putting your head in the sand." I have been told that I am not willing to hear the truth about how there are a few people who have sold their souls to Satan in order to have dominion over this world. They have looked under the stones of this earth and have discovered who is "really" running things. Even good and reasonable people have sent me these things. They send them to me in fear, in anxiety, and they either want me to be in their misery and fear, or they want me to affirm the secrets they are learning.

Forgive the rant, but friends, we have to come back to the truth of the Gospel. There is no power that is greater than the grace of Jesus, than his sacrifice on the cross and his victory over death. If you want to peddle in fear and live your life there, I cannot stop you; but I believe your time is better spent in meditating on the life of Jesus, in prayer to the Holy Spirit, and in encouraging one another. Why search for darkness when there is light all around us? Paul even mentioned it in 1 Thessalonians 5--We are children of the light. We don't need to peddle in darkness, it does the kingdom of God no good. We have to be better than that if our witness is to have any sort of credibility

15 With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter.

Well, Paul said it better than I did yesterday. He was more pastoral and had much more grace and love for his congregation. His imperative is that they hold on to the truth that was given to them.

That simple truth of the Gospel, that mission that Jesus had to save the world, and that they could join him in the great Co-Mission, regardless of whether it was the end of time or if it is just a random Tuesday when everything seems to be going just fine.

He tells them to stand firm. I love that visual metaphor. I was once in Norway, preaching at a campmeeting. It was amazing! The lake where we were camped was beautiful, the people were incredible and the food was so great! On Friday, they were having a youth event that was a bit of an obstacle course. Now, in the US, we have some rules and liability issues, so things can't get too crazy when it comes to youth games. Apparently, that is not the case in Norway! They had these kids doing the wildest things. Things like bobbing for apples in a mud puddle, eating some very strange things, jumping onto things that did not seem safe. The end of the course made them jump into the lake, which was VERY COLD, and swimming a significant distance. I was standing next to this older gentlemen lamenting the fact that these kids were made to do the

craziest things and he said to me; "These Norwegians are crazy!" I thought he was Norwegian, so I had to ask, where are you from? "Denmark!" he said.

It turned out, he had married a Norwegian woman and had spent the last 60 years in Norway. She was standing next to him and said, "yep, Norwegians are crazy!" and she laughed. When I asked her to say more this is what she said: "Norwegians will find a big lake with an island, build a house on that island facing the wind, and when winter comes, they will go out in front of their house and dare the wind to blow it down!"

I want to be clear, I have no idea if that is true or not, so apologies to all my Norwegian friends. However, when I hear that phrase telling me to "Stand Firm" that is what I think of. And Paul was admonishing them because he knew what he had taught them, and he knew it was true. They were forgetting words and ideas he had already imparted to them. You can almost hear his frustration, but you can also hear his love for his church. He tells them these things so they can stay firm. I wish we had done this series before all the world went crazy. Perhaps it would have worked to remind us of the power of the Gospel and the deep power it has to right the world.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, 17 comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.

And this is the deep truth. Our hope, our love, our grace, our comfort all comes from Jesus. Whenever we focus on anything else things can get weird. Here, Paul speaks both the Father and the Son as equals (as we know they are in trinitarian theology), and advocates for their love and grace and comfort and hope.

Let's look at these three things. First, grace is unmerited favor, given to us freely by God. Our salvation rests on this simple concept, and our eternity is sealed together with him because of this amazing gift. Have you ever been given something you didn't deserve. Was it a big enough gift that you were embarrassed by the gift that was given? That is grace. Another example comes from the Moody Monthly, in 1981, page 81: "Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker both had churches in London in the 19th century. On one occasion, Parker commented on the poor condition of children

admitted to Spurgeon's orphanage. It was reported to Spurgeon however, that Parker had criticized the orphanage itself. Spurgeon blasted Parker the next week from the pulpit. The attack was printed in the newspapers and became the talk of the town. People flocked to Parker's church the next Sunday to hear his rebuttal. "I understand Dr. Spurgeon is not in his pulpit today, and this is the Sunday they use to take an

offering for the orphanage. I suggest we take a love offering here instead." The crowd was delighted. The ushers had to empty the collection plates 3 times. Later that week there was a knock at Parker's study. It was Spurgeon. "You know Parker, you have practiced grace on me. You have given me not what I deserved, you have given me what I needed.

Secondly, what is eternal comfort? Martin Luther says it this way: "This is a comforting Gospel, which so beautifully portrays the Lord Jesus and teaches us what manner of person he is, what kind of works he does, and how he is disposed toward men. And there is no better way to understand it than to contrast light and darkness and day and night; that is, the good shepherd with the wicked one, as the Lord himself does." This is the comfort that comes from knowing that God is for us and not against us. Metaphors of darkness and light remind us that there is no darkness in the God we serve. Rather, he is all of light and we walk in that light and we are children of the light as well.

And thirdly, a wonderful hope. There is a story of a young girl, probably 6 or 7 years old waiting at an airport. The night was snowy and blizzardy, but she was waiting, with her eyes wide open. A security guard went to ask her if he could help her, call anyone for her, or wait with her. She said "no", her daddy was coming. As the time got

longer and the airport almost emptied out, she was asked again if there was anything that could be done for her. Again, she said no, her daddy was coming. A half-hour later, with the airport nearly empty, and still with a smile on her face, a man, covered in snow

walked in from the outside door. He shook off his hat and her face lit up, "Daddy" she cried! She never had a doubt that he would come for her.

This is the wonderful hope we have. A hope that does not disappoint (Romans 5:5).

1 – What is Grace to you?

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2 – How does it comfort you?

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3 – In whom is your hope, and why?

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This has been a big week. Lots of stuff to unpack for sure. There are things that could be considered scary, things that unsettle us, an understanding that there is evil, and for a while, it will look like it will win. We could spend our time on all of this; we could spend our time trying to name the evil that exists, putting a timeframe and a face to the name given. We could spend our time, like many before us, trying to figure out when and how all this will happen, and what will happen to us in the meantime.

However, if we do that, we will be focusing on the fear and not the faith of this text. Paul wrote the first part, so that we could have comfort in the second part. He talks about the evil, only to set up the victory of God. Why would we spend time on the process, when the outcome is what we need to be focusing on? When you finish baking cookies, do you wait to eat them so you can discuss

where you were in the baking process, or do you just eat the cookies? While you eat them, you may discuss how they were baked, but only as an afterthought, because the cookies are the reward for going through the process.

So many have had a deep desire to understand everything that is going to happen as a way to prepare for the end of time, rather than focus on the strength that comes from understanding that God is the victor, regardless of what has come before. I am often amazed that we would rather sit in the darkness rather than moving toward

the light that ultimately comes at the end of the tunnel. Understanding the darkness is a fool's errand. Let's say we spent all the time it takes to understand who the "man of lawlessness" is, what the timelines are for the trials and struggles people of faith will endure, and how much we will suffer. Will that change the outcome of God being the victory? Will it change the sacrifice that Jesus made on the Cross for us? Will it increase our identification with the resurrection of Jesus? Why would we waste time on what evil will do when we can spend our time on what Jesus has done?

Why give Satan that kind of intellectual real estate in your life? He is a parenthetical statement in the book of life. He is not the protagonist of the story, nor should we spend our time finding out his motivation or process. While it might seem interesting, even knowing it all does nothing for our understanding of who God is. You might be someone who wants to spend time on this in order to "understand" what will happen at the end of time, however your thoughts are misplaced. Because if you are studying the evil, you are not studying the end of time, rather, you are studying the "almost" end of time, a quasi-eschatological view of the world. Because we know at the end, Jesus wins. And that is not a hope, that is a fact. So let us spend our time on the qualities of Jesus we want to see expressed in our lives each and every day. It is those qualities that will carry us through the evil times Paul suggests will come in 2 Thessalonians.

WEEK 6

2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-13 (NLT)

Paul's Request for Prayer

1 Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord's message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you. **2** Pray, too, that we will be rescued from wicked and evil people, for not everyone is a believer. **3** But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. **4** And we are confident in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we commanded you. **5** May the Lord lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.

An Exhortation to Proper Living

6 And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believer who live idle lives and don't follow the tradition they received from us. **7** For you know that you ought to imitate us. We were not idle when we were with you. **8** We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you. **9** We certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. **10** Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat."

11 Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business. **12** We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living. **13** As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.

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.

This seems like a turning of the tide. The teacher is now asking for prayers from the apprentices. This shows a bond with the church both in suffering and in participation. When we pray for someone, it is us participating in their joy, their pain, their suffering, and their situation. When something happens in the world, people of faith are quick to say “thoughts and prayers...” for the situation. These statements take a great deal of criticism from those who don’t believe in prayer and therefore might not understand a few things. One, they don’t understand the power of prayer, not to change God’s mind, but to bring together people who desperately feel empathy for these situations. And two, they don’t understand the vernacular of faith. When we say “thoughts and prayers...” we are talking about a focus on the situation, the willingness to do what we can to help.

Now, if we believers don’t DO anything after our prayers, perhaps we are praying the wrong prayers. Prayers motivate us to participate in the plight of others. As you have “thoughts and prayers” for people, also take the next step to tangibly become a source of help, love, light and alleviation of that suffering. We can do all these things together, and become a force for good in the world. Prayer is participation, and Paul wants them to participate in his ministry, as

Paul participates in the community of God in Thessalonica.

There is also a sense of foreboding in the second verse we study today. Paul wants these prayers as encouragement and also as deliverance from “wicked and evil” men. Does Paul think that all those who don’t believe are wicked and evil? I don’t believe so, but he has been making a case in the previous chapters about those who afflict the afflicted, and those people are evil and wicked. So it seems those are the ones he is speaking specifically about today. And to be sure, there are those that are wicked and evil in the world, and they choose to be. Just like choosing to be in the kingdom of God, choosing not to be is a conscious choice, as well.

His final phrase, “for not all have faith” is interesting. I think that faith is a thing that allows you to move away from what we instinctively fall into. We have a propensity for the not great stuff in the world. Faith in something more, specifically Jesus, elevates our conversations, our actions, and our aspirations. While we don’t always hit the nail on the head, we certainly can try in ways we might not have.

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. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Wow! These are texts of encouragement today. But I want you to understand the encouragement; it is not about us, but about the faithfulness of God in all situations. When Paul says God will “establish” you, it means that he will put you in a position. Have you ever been promoted? Did you promote yourself, or did the company you work for find value in you and your talents and decisions, and then establish you in another position? Of course, it was them. You were not passive, but you deserved the position.

In the same way, it is God who establishes us and then protects us in the new position he has created for us. That new position is as a son and daughter of God. (2 Corinthians 6:18) And Paul then states that they have incredible confidence in the Lord about you. Even though you are amazing, you are more amazing through Christ who establishes and protects you.

Even in the direction of hearts, God is the one who gets the credit. Now, that may be tough for some of us to think we won't get the credit for the work we do in the world. I get it, I don't like it when people take credit for something I have done. However, I don't mind God getting the credit for everything that I have done, because I could only do it through Him and through

His power. On my own, I don't always make great decisions; I find myself being pretty foolish and having a hard time concentrating. But when God gets involved, there is a focus and competency that I don't possess on my own. I am so grateful for His power in my life to accomplish anything. The credit will always be all His!

It is always a blessing to be encouraged by someone who knows you, understands you, and is willing to reach out. Encouragement is such an undervalued character trait. Who do you know in your life who is an encourager? How can you encourage them? Often, encouragers don't get encouraged because they are so busy encouraging...

I love how Paul embraces the Thessalonians and is not afraid to say it, to give them love, to direct them to what God has done for them, and to increase their understanding of the character of God. When Paul says, “God is faithful,” he means it as an encouragement. Implied is the idea that there is nothing that can stand against God, so if He remains faithful, we will be the overcomers spoken of in Romans 8. With this encouragement, we should be able to head out to the day knowing that God has this all in hand, He built you for what He is asking

you to do today, and there is nothing that can stand in your way. The gates of hell will not prevail.

Perhaps someone needs to hear this

today. So it is yours. If you don't need it, make sure you pass it on to someone who does.

1 – What is God enabling you to do today? What can you give Him credit for?

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2 – How do these words encourage you?

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3 – Who do you have “confidence in the lord about” today? Can you let them know?

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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. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you,

Paul has a specific issue with laziness. Let's just call it out. He does not suffer the lazy lightly, and perhaps this is because he is so industrious. Paul chose the lifestyle of ministry, not the job. There are some who approach faith and witness as if it is optional and they can take off the responsibility like taking off a jacket. For Paul, this was not the case. He was all in, all the time, and didn't have a great deal of time for people who were willing to lie down on the job.

When Paul is saying to "keep away" from those who are idle, he is really saying that you should avoid being like that person. And he is not talking about someone who decides to take an afternoon and catch up on the "Tiger King" on Netflix. (Which, by the way, is just bonkers. . .) But Paul is talking about those who have decided not to do what God is calling them to do, those who live a life that is of no use to God because they are not willing to do anything for God. This sounds harsh, but I want to clarify. We should have down times in our lives when we are less productive than others. But a "break" is not what Paul is talking about. He is talking about those who shirk any responsibility having to do with

faith. He wants us to avoid them as they may rub off on us.

I heard T.D. Jakes speak one time, and he mentioned that if you were not being tempted in life, then even the devil had no use for you. Those words hit me hard. Temptation means that Satan needs to derail you from the threat you are to him, and the use you are to God. If we aren't doing anything for God, then Satan can leave us alone, as we are not posing any problems to his plans.

In the same way, Paul seems to detest those who are willing to be of no use to God. For Paul, who seemed to be very much a type "A" personality, sloth and idleness are at the top of his list of disappointments to God. He was constantly working for Jesus, and I think he expected others to be doing the same thing. While he seemed to have no patience for these people, he also believed they might be able to become effective for the kingdom; all they had to do was choose to be effective.

We can choose to be effective as well. Honesty, humility, and industriousness will create that effective ripple for the kingdom of God we all so desperately want to see happen. It will look different for every

person, but it will be effective for God. It is a choice, not an accident. So sit down and write a letter of encouragement, share your story, study scripture with someone, just

have a great meal and pray before it. There is so much we can do to expand the kingdom of God through our love and our lives. Don't be afraid to be effective!

1 – What can you do for God today?

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2 – Are you being tempted? What do you think that means?

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3 – If you could do anything for God, what would it be, and how can you get to that place in life?

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8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. 9 It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.

Paul is now beginning to give instruction and show how he was modeling what is beneficial when it comes to working for the kingdom. Paul worked while he was with them. He didn't expect a hand-out or payment for the Gospel work he was doing. We often use the term "tent-maker" to identify those who are bi-vocational with ministry and another job or career as well. This comes from Paul's career as one who worked with his hands. There is such honor and nobility in the work we do outside of ministry. However, even the work we do outside of ministry is ministry.

At the time of Paul's writing, there were those preachers and teachers who would come into a town and live off of other believers as if it were their right to do so. Paul worried there might be some usury happening, and so he simply wanted to show them another way. And remember, this was Paul! He was well known amongst the believers and they would have paid greatly to have him in their homes and in their town. However, he didn't want this to be an example of how believers should live.

Perhaps this was a response to the usury that had been seen in the temple of Jerusalem for so many years. I am actually writing this on Holy Monday of the final week of Jesus. Today's texts show us Jesus going to the temple and chasing out the

sellers and shopkeepers and moving in the sick and the lame and healing them. It is ironic that today we are dealing with Paul saying he worked for his food and bread. Rather than living off of an economy created by the Gospel, he decided he would work outside in order to not be beholding to any community or believer. It is not that he didn't need the money, he still had to live, but he was willing to put his hand to the plow in order to make ends meet.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his interview with Tim Ferris (the Tim Ferris Podcast) said when he realized that all we really needed was a roof over our heads and some food in our bellies and enough clothes to make it through the week; the rest was ego. I thought about that for a long time. Even those of us in ministry sometimes think something is owed us for the work we do. Paul would argue it is a great privilege to be able to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he would pay for that privilege. That is pretty amazing.

1 – What do you do that allows you to be able to do ministry?

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2 – Do you feel there is a difference between your job and your ministry?

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3 – How can one feed into the other, and vice-versa?

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10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 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.

“Not busy at work, but busybodies...”

The interesting thing is that this was a wordplay back from the Greek, not just in the English language. Do you know any busybodies? People who are always moving and talking, but doing very little. When I hear this term I think of my chicken. I know, it's weird that I have a chicken, and just one. But we dig the eggs and we are keeping her just in case this pandemic keeps going. . . for the eggs, of course! However, she walks around the backyard not doing a great deal, but man is she clucking. It is as if she is telling everyone around her what is really going on.

Here is the thing about busybodies: They are in everyone's business and they are stirring up trouble. They aren't trying to build the kingdom, but they are often trying to tear down people who are doing great work. They can't imagine this is what they are doing, but by the very nature of their communication and focus on gossip, they are stirring a pot that doesn't need to be stirred.

Paul really seems to be annoyed at them, to the point he is serious about not letting them eat. He wants them to earn their own wages, not to live off of others. But he encourages them to change their

ways, so that they might contribute to the community and to the kingdom of God.

Now, the word “busy” has become a badge of honor that too many of us wear in order to show people how important we are. Our lives have become busier and busier, but I don't know if we are being more effective or just becoming busybodies. I know I have been guilty of this. In some ways, our isolation has stopped this, and in other ways, it has gotten worse. I am thinking of all the teachers who have had to learn to teach online classes in an hour or two, or people who have had to figure out how to work from home when they haven't done this before.

On the other hand, as of writing this, I haven't filled my car up with gas in over a month, my family is working on puzzles, and we seem to be finding more time to talk to one another because we are close to each other. So we have slowed down in some ways.

How have you slowed down, and how have you become more busy? Can you keep that balance?

13 As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

I love this text. And we would say it “brothers and sisters,” of course. The final call to not grow tired of doing good is important. It is easy to get compassion fatigue. That is when we have been doing good, in such a busy way for so long that we become literally tired of having to think about doing more good in the world. Paul is warning us against this.

The reason Paul is warning us is that he understands it. I am sure there were times when Paul wanted to just stop, to simply sit and do nothing. But he wasn’t built that way; he was a pusher. He was always pushing to move the dial on what God was calling him to do. He must have been exhausting to hang out with. You know that type of person, driven, with deep wells of energy, and usually with a charisma to match.

Paul wanted everyone to understand that we have a limited time on this earth, and so we should use it wisely. Do the work that God has called us to in order for us to be able to continue the kingdom of God through the next generation, across borders, and into all the world. I can imagine when Paul was in the prison in Rome, he had written on the walls a whole strategy to take the gospel even further. I mean, the book of Romans was an introduction and fundraiser letter to get

him to Spain. This guy was always working.

What Work has God given you to do before the end of all of this? Thessalonians thought they were living in the end of time, and so do we. We are all awaiting the “day of the Lord” in order to see our savior again. Whether it happens at the end or middle of this pandemic, or whether it is 1,000 years away, we can put our hands to the plow and do the work that God is calling us toward. This is not so God has to come as we finish the work; rather, it is because God can use us to show love and grace to the world, and we should be ready and willing to do that work each and every day. The way the world changes is for us to commit to showing love and compassion to each and every person we meet.

1 – How has God shown compassion to you and how can you show that same compassion to others?

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2 –Have you ever grown weary of doing good? What were the circumstances?

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3 – How has your understanding of this book changed over the last few weeks?

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Wow, day 35 of this guide and five weeks into the sermon series. I am hoping that our lives are getting back to some semblance of normalcy. Actually, right now I don't see us ever going back exactly to the way things were. I hope we learn through this time and I hope that we become even better at Sabbathating, at understanding our families, at seeing the greater narrative, and at being a people of God who love and care for one another.

I also hope that this series has helped with some anxiety when it comes to the end of time and how we should think about it. I know that our faith tradition, Adventism, has often done a bit of a job on us when we were younger about the end of time. I can remember being at recess and seeing that cloud that looked like a fist and wondering if this was "it!" Perhaps God was coming right then. That not only made me nervous, but it created a deep sense of dread in me, probably because I felt like I wasn't "prepared..."

I don't know if I really knew what "being prepared" even meant. And I wonder the same today. I find myself really serious about caring for people, showing them Jesus, and making sure they understand how much he loves them. And this has done

an interesting thing for me; it has made my anxiety about being "ready" for the return of Jesus subside. Why? Because it has made me realize that Jesus has already won, and my job is to let people know. Judgment doesn't scare me, because it isn't about me. It is about a God who loves us so much He was willing to die for us. That's all I need to know.

Maybe I am foolish to think that God is in this much control, and that at the end of it all the Bible will be proven right about the character of God. That's okay if this is what you think. One thing I know is that what Jesus did on the Cross has covered my sin, and my life is a response to that work of salvation. We can try to make this more complicated, but I don't think we need to. Seek first the kingdom of God and it's king and everything else will fall in line.

Thank you for being on this journey with us. I hope that God has kept you and grown you through this time of isolation and this time of study. May grace be your guide to Jesus, and may you always have courage and be courageous.

Pastor Tim



CROSSWALK