

Hurst Green
26th Jan 20
Encouraging Report
1 Thess 3

In our gallop through Thessalonians we have reached chapter 3. By the way I hope you found the homework of two weeks ago helpful, or at least thought provoking. My whole aim in standing here Sunday by Sunday is to get you thinking. Thinking about the bible, thinking about your faith and, most of all, thinking about your God.

Continually ask yourself how you are growing in your faith – it is a challenge but our faith should not be static. I keep emphasising energetic words like “Eagerly desire” to encourage you to do what you bible tells you and not just to cruise through life feeling it’s all just good enough.

And this week’s chapter has some challenges for you as well.

Paul is writing from a time of difficulty in his life.

1 Thessalonians 3:3 (ANIV)

³ *so that no-one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.*

And he had known these trials were coming

1 Thessalonians 3:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.*

And we have our trials – no one’s life is plain sailing; we all have storms and squalls along the way and Paul shows us how to live through them.

The problem is that when storms strike, and sometimes they seem to go on for ever – like sailing through the roaring forties when we thought we should be sailing the Caribbean islands – all sun, sea and sand.

Well no one’s life is like that and so we hit our storms and we revert to type.

We are like the disciples in the incident that is recorded in all three synoptic gospels

Matthew 8:24-25 (ANIV)

²⁴ *Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.* ²⁵ *The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"*

The disciples focussed on themselves and their predicament.

You can find a similar approach with Jonah when their boat hit a storm or the in the boat before Paul’s shipwreck.

We go all me, me, me.

And Jesus would say to us as he said to his disciples in the storm “You of little faith” because in difficult times we forget our faith and focus on the problem

Ephesians 3:16-17 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit*

in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

We forget the power we have in ourselves – that God given power that is sufficient for all things

1 Corinthians 3:16 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

But Paul does not do this – there is that amazing verse in James

James 1:2 (ANIV)

² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

And James says this because these tests produce in us perseverance.

So rather than the me, me, me attitude learn from Paul and see when he does in his trials. Rather than focussing on them and the molehills around him.

1 Thessalonians 3:5 (ANIV)

⁵ *For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.*

Paul thought about others and did not just think about them he set out to find out about them.

He took action.

I have on many occasions encouraged you to find out what is going on in God's Kingdom here on earth. Where is God moving and what is he doing with our brothers and sisters. It was great last week to hear what is going on in Sachibondu – not just in the hospital although the way that God doubled our money to increase the number of beds and the timing of them arriving just as they opened the new wards was a joy to hear.

But also in the Church and the depth of faith God is developing in the young. Graham's gardener who would rather attend his group in studying and praying than earn some extra money – a great example.

But finding out what is going on in the kingdom lifts your eyes from your problems and reminds you that we worship a very big God and we need to remember that Jesus has been given all authority and he has promised to be with us to the very end of the age and so that power and authority is in us.

We do not face our problems alone and if we will lift our eyes we will see an amazing God at work.

And we need to remember Rom 8:28

Romans 8:28 (ANIV)

²⁸ *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

It may seem tough, we may seem insurmountable but it only seems that way because we have chosen the wrong perspective.

We have chosen the world's view when we have available to us God's view.

So Paul in the midst of his troubles set out to find out about the Thessalonians and how they were doing.

Where we have as many magazines as we want, we have all the TV channels and we have the Internet Paul had to do things a different way and he sent Timothy to find out how things were going.

And he has just got back

1 Thessalonians 3:6 (ANIV)

⁶ *But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.*

This encouraged Paul in what he describes as his “*distress and persecution*” and this is why we need to be linked with other groups so that we might be encouraged when our lives seem difficult.

Knowing what God is up to encourages us. And we don’t have to go far – the night shelters that are running in this area for the homeless are God at work through his people. People have seen the good works that God has put before them and rather than turning away have chosen the right way and are doing the good works.

And of course this has to make us think of the other way round. If Timothy came here to see us would he take a good report back of how we are doing?

Timothy reported back that they were standing firm in the Lord and see how Paul responds to that.

In verse 9 he talks of the joy that he has in the presence of God because of the Thessalonians.

Even in his distress and persecution he finds joy because he has heard of Christians standing firm.

Throughout the bible we have the picture of the Church. As a family, as a body, working together, building one another up, loving supporting and valuing each other.

Is that how you see Church? That sort of Church should be a priority in your life; it is the sort of Church that you would want to be part of. It should take precedence over other things because you want to be part of it.

You want to be part of it because it will help you grow and also because you can help others to grow.

And look at Paul’s reaction to the good report that Timothy had brought. Paul is already on his knees thanking God for the Thessalonians and now

1 Thessalonians 3:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.*

And did you notice what Paul teaches us about prayer when the storms of life are blowing?

The start of verse 10 – **Night and Day**.

Paul did not mind giving time to prayer in fact he found time for it. It did not have to be a few minutes in a day he prayed Night and Day for the Thessalonians and he could do so because he had found out about them.

How many of you this last week have prayed regularly for the work in Sachibondu? We had the good report last week and we had lots to thank God for and lots to pray for but did we?

Then there is one of those really active words again – **earnestly**. This is no quick prayer when Paul could fit it in. He earnestly prays for them.

And his prayer was practical. It is very easy to pray in vague terms. Lord bless them type of prayers but Paul prays specifically. He wants to see them again and so he tells God that that is what he wants.

It requires faith to pray practically but you need to remember that God knows you – he made you. Those funny desires you have are God given and God wants you to talk to him about them.

What is it you want in life; what is it you are doing; what would you like God to do in your life and in the lives of those around you. And not just your brothers and sisters – in your neighbours!

Nothing is too small to bring to God and nothing is too big that he cannot handle it.

Pray practically!

Now in that lies a challenge.

Do you thank God for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you thank God for the way they reflect Christ and help and encourage you?

And in that remember Hebrews 10:25

Hebrews 10:24 (ANIV)

²⁴ *And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.*

That is just before the reminder not to give up on meeting together because of course it is meeting together that we get to encourage one another and to stand alongside each other and ensure that we stand firm in Christ.

But that verse in Hebrews is again an active one.

It is not about encouraging one another when you bump into someone. That verse requires us to consider how we may spur one another on.

It means taking time to think about each other and to ask that fundamental question:

“What can I do to help my brother be a better Christian?”

It is finding ways to help each other be more effective in the body of Christ. Not in stumbling across ways or in the occasional word but actively considering for each individual how you can help them.

And doing that during the storms of life.

Not focussing on the storms because I can tell you that the storms are just part of life. Different storms at different times and occasionally you may find a lull so you can catch your breath but storms are here and storms will come.

But that doesn't mean that we forget our mission to be the body of Christ and a key part of that is helping each other to be a better Christian; by example but also by actively considering how we can spur each other on.

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 (ANIV)

¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Paul prays for unlimited love. That is the sort of Love that we should be praying for and which our world needs so much. We read in our papers and hear in the news how much hate there is in the world.

The way people use social media, the so called Trolls, shows how easy it is to hate, to rip down and to destroy but we are in the opposite business.

We are in the business of unlimited love, of building one another up, of considering how we may spur one another on to bigger and greater things.

It is harder work but so much more rewarding.

So pray for unlimited love that will flow out from us all and spur us on in doing the Lord's work.

It doesn't matter what the current storm is encourage yourself by seeking out those good reports that you may pray and praise God for all he has done and all he is doing rather than stare at your toes feeling hard done by.

That unlimited love is far more fun than watching the storms roll in.

Go, follow Paul's example and enjoy that unlimited love that God gives.