

Hurst Green
16th Feb 20
Healthy Church
2 Thess 1:1-5

Last week we ended our brief look at 1 Thessalonians with healthy living and we had that recurring phrase

1 Thessalonians 4:1 (ANIV)

¹ Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

Paul was encouraging the Thessalonians even as he praised them for the way in which they were living.

This new Church – all of them had been Christians for less than a year – had taken on board the teaching they had been given and it was quite radical teaching for where they had been.

They had to change their whole lives from one of hedonistic values to one of caring more about each other than themselves.

And they had done so!

And yet now they were being encouraged not only for what they had been doing but also to do it more and more.

And I am afraid that is the Christian life. Until you hear that “well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23) you will always be encouraged to do so more and more because there is so much more to be done.

God is continually laying good works before you for you to do individually and collectively and it does not matter that we are not a Church of hundreds we have our good works.

- Our good works in Sachibondu.
- Our good works supporting Derrick and Pam in Greece.
- Our good works in supporting the Renewed Hope Trust
- Our good works in supporting our neighbourhood.
- Our good works in supporting each other.

In all of these I am with Paul in commending you for doing these and yet encouraging and urging you to do these more and more.

And I can tell you from my own experience that in stretching yourself to do this there are great rewards.

Great rewards in the here and now and great rewards in the treasures you are laying up in heaven for your eternity.

So let's move on from 1 Thessalonians to 2 Thessalonians which is written very shortly after the first epistle and in summary the three chapters cover three points:

- Chapter 1 is greetings, encouragement, instruction and prayer in the light of their suffering.
- Chapter 2 is instruction, thanksgiving and prayer in the light of the day of the Lord
- Chapter 3 is prayer, instruction regarding lazy Christians and closing prayer.

Did you notice any common themes in those brief summaries?

The day of the Lord comes up which we have touched on in 1 Thessalonians and which is open to so much discussion, navel gazing and argument that, while it is important, I tend to put it to one side in the category “ we will recognise it when we see it.”

In all three chapters we have instruction and instruction is always good for us. Remember Proverbs 16

Proverbs 16:20 (ANIV)

²⁰ *Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.*

There are many wise sayings in Proverbs!!!

In all three chapters we have prayer and we all know prayer is good for us. I always remember one of our bible studies based on the Brooklyn Tabernacle in which they said that the weekly prayer meeting became their most exciting meeting of the week!

Last week we looked at what it takes to be living a healthy life and so for today we are going to focus on just the first five verses of 2 Thessalonians 1 and see what it takes to be a healthy church.

This is, of course, not a complete list as there is always more we can be doing but these five points give us a very good starting point.

Firstly a healthy church **stands out**

2 Thessalonians 1:1 (ANIV)

¹ *Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

Paul writes this letter to the Church and for that to be a valid term of address the Church there had to be distinct – it had to stand out. The people in the Church had to know that they were the Church and people outside the Church had to know that they were not the Church.

Throughout his gospel Jesus has called us to be different. Remember he said in his prayer for his disciples:

John 17:15-17 (ANIV)

¹⁵ *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.* ¹⁶ *They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.* ¹⁷ *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*

And from that we get that oft used phrase that we are in the world but not of it for our distinctiveness does not rely on us withdrawing from the world but on us being in the world while living to a different set of values.

The world is all about the here and now and what we have while the Church is about eternity and laying up treasures in heaven.

The world has morals that shift with time which is why things that were unacceptable in our grandparents' time are acceptable to this generation and, at times, the world's morals shift the other way.

We believe in the morals laid out in the bible as the standard we have to live by and these do not change from generation to generation. Living to those standards makes us distinct and identifiable as the Church.

Secondly a healthy church **reflects the grace and peace**

2 Thessalonians 1:2 (ANIV)

² *Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul blesses this Church with grace and peace. This was a common blessing among the new Church.

We know grace as that unmerited favour of God that gives us freely so many things not least our salvation (Romans 3:24).

Peace is that state of mind and soul in the face of all that is going on in the world around us. Unfortunately, as we know, it does not excuse us from the trials and tribulations that everyone in the world faces but we have the Peace of God that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7) to see us through them.

But the other aspect of peace we have that the world does not have is peace with our God and that peace is the source of our peace when we are in the world.

Peace in our souls that the barriers we had built dividing us from our God had been torn down. Our sins have been forgiven not through anything we did but through the grace of God. Our God loves us personally and since he is unchanging he will love us forever.

So a healthy church stands out and has the grace of God our Father and his peace in our hearts through all that goes on.

Thirdly a healthy church **has increasing faith and love**

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (ANIV)

³ *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.*

Paul does not congratulate the Thessalonians on their growing faith and love but chooses to thank God for it. Paul is acknowledging that these things come from God.

We must remember that we have a part to play in all of this because it is our responsibility to be growing in these - this is part of the doing so more and more. We cannot just sit back and say it is up to God and so we have nothing to do. We need to be stood there exercising these things so that they can grow as God gives them to us.

Our increasing faith is important because although at our conversion we had faith in our God so we do not stand still.

As we see our God at work our faith grows and so we make ourselves available to God.

As our God uses us our faith grows.

Think on the Exodus. The people came out of Egypt and saw God work amazing miracles for them. They still grumbled and moaned but God worked those miracles despite them.

Initially the miracles were just done by God for the people.

Then as faith grew Moses and Aaron became involved in the miracles following the instructions of God.

Then when they finally believed enough God led them into the Promised Land and wrought the miracles through them such as the Jordan parting when the people marched towards it and the walls of Jericho falling when the people marched around them.

Their faith grew.

And through that increasing faith flows the increasing love – that Love that we have to show more and more as Paul urges us to.

This is an easy one because there are always more ways to show our love and more people to love. In fact there is so much more that we could be doing that that in itself becomes an impediment to more love because we do not know where to start!

Jesus of course gives us the answer to this when he tells us to love our neighbour as our self and our neighbour is those people around us and Paul also helps us in his Epistle to the Ephesians

Ephesians 2:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Stop worrying and love those around you and do the good works around you and God will show you more and more.

So a healthy church stands out, has the grace of God our Father and his peace in our hearts and has increasing peace and love

Fourthly a healthy church **perseveres**

2 Thessalonians 1:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.*

Perseverance is at the heart of the gospel. Remember Jesus' teaching on the farmer and his seed in Matthew 13.

Some seed never took root but even among the seed that did root we have the seed that fell on the rocky soil and the seed that fell among the thorns.

The seed in the rocky soil grew quickly but without depth and the sun scorched it and it withered and Jesus in his explanation later in the same chapter says that when trouble or persecution came these people only lasted a short time.

Trouble or persecution will come and try and scorch the word from our lives and our only defence is to ensure the roots are deep into our lives.

And the seed among the weeds is those who let the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth strangle the word and so make it unproductive.

I like that “deceitfulness” of wealthy for that is what wealth does – it deceives. It tells us that it will make us safe and that it will remove the worries of life and yet it does none of these – it deceives us.

So a healthy church stands out, has the grace of God our Father and his peace in our hearts, has increasing peace and love and perseveres.

And fifthly a healthy church **regards all this as evidence**

2 Thessalonians 1:5 (ANIV)

⁵ *All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.*

This may seem a strange one but if our gospel was false the world would have no need to attack us and persecute us. The evil one could just leave us be since we would be lost. But we are not lost – we have the gospel; the word of God, the word of Truth (John 17:17)

Our persecution is as nothing compared with too many of our brothers and sisters in the rest of the world.

I have mentioned before the Bishop of Truro’s independent report last year into the persecution of Christians which the Foreign Secretary had asked him to produce. It showed some worrying statistics.

- Christianity is persecuted in 144 countries.
- In the Middle East the proportion of the people who are Christians fell from 20% to just 5%. Remember that next time you think about the refugee problem.
- Christianity receives 80% of religious motivated discrimination worldwide.

How is our love growing for our brothers and sisters?

I have often pointed out that in our country Christianity is persecuted, ridiculed and made fun of in a way that no other faith has to endure. This happens because the world knows our God is the one true God and wants to prevent people from hearing its gospel. The way we are treated is the evidence!

And a healthy Church knows this

So a healthy church stands out, has the grace of God our Father and his peace in our hearts, has increasing peace and love, perseveres and knows that all of this is evidence that Gods judgement is right.

As a Church we should review our own health against these criteria and see how we are doing and I think the answer is to be found in Thessalonians.

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