

Hurst Green
23rd Feb 20
Hope not fear
2 Thess 2:1-5 13-17

So, given what I said about the end times last week I now find myself faced with a complete chapter on the end times.

There was obviously something going on in Thessalonica at this time that was causing consternation among this young church.

When there is consternation or any sort of disturbance in a Church the only solution is the one that Paul is using here and that is to tackle it head on.

I have been in some form of leadership all of my adult life and I have observed other leaders at work. Some of them have been afraid to tackle issues and all that happens is that the issue grows and grows until it blows up in their faces and the results are never good.

So a lesson to remember – if there is a disturbance or consternation in your life it is always better to tackle it than to leave it.

Let's see how Paul is tackling this one.

The end times are dealt with in many places in the bible including the Old Testament prophets who must not be forgotten – we are still waiting for many of their prophecies to come to fruition and they have proved themselves to be reliable because their other prophecies have come to pass in their day and in the times in between.

Of course we are taught in the bible how to test prophets and John tells us to test them (1 John 4:1)

So how do we test prophets?

- Firstly it must not contradict the word of God that we already have. (Isa 8:20)
- The prophet will testify to Jesus (1 John 4:2-3)
- The fruit of their life will be in harmony with God's word (Matt 7:15)
- Their prophecies will come to pass (Deut 18:20-22)

And this testing must be done for there are many false prophets already in this world with the aim to lead us astray and many who are obsessed with the end times fall into this category because they would have us studying the times for signs of the end of the world when we know that the Word of God teaches us to live the life and live it fully for God.

And so to deal with this chapter of end times teachings.

The end times spawn many discussions and much navel gazing as we try to interpret the teaching we have but, like all prophecy, we will recognise it best when we actually see it.

But men get tied up in this as 2 Peter says

2 Peter 3:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."*

If we spend our time worrying about all the teachings of catastrophe. Armageddon, Pre and post millennialism and trying to draw out time lines we will not be doing what Jesus has taught us.

So while being aware of the end times teaching we don't want to be obsessed about it because I will let you into a little secret – we are living in the end times and have been since Jesus ascended into heaven.

We of course also have that famous verse

2 Peter 3:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*

And so we will never know when the day of the Lord is until it arrives!

Paul, Peter and James all use the phrase that the day is “at hand” and the early church lived in that expectation – Jesus would come any day now.

In many ways we need to have that thought closer to our hearts as it motivates us in witnessing to our Lord because we do not know how long we have got. The thought should stop us procrastinating and we can be very good at procrastinating.

We have lost that enthusiasm that came with our first love and need to regain it as we have sung this morning.

But also we need to live as if we have a long time to live for because

2 Peter 3:9 (ANIV)

⁹ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

And that is the critical thing – the Lord is still gathering to himself new believers and we have the privilege of helping them see the truth and then discipling them in their new faith for that is what we have been told to do.

So what are we going to get out of this Chapter in 2 Thessalonians?

We have said that the end times are important but that we must not get obsessed by them and so what I want us to do this morning is to look at why Paul wrote this section for it will show us why there is so much teaching about the end times in the bible.

Rather than being distracted by time lines and detailed discussions I want us to look at the start and the finish of this chapter to see the purpose behind the teaching

The Chapter starts by telling us its purpose:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 (ANIV)

¹ *Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.*

He does not want the Church to become unsettled or alarmed by things that are going on.

Unsettled is sometimes translated as shaken and it is easy to be shaken by some of the end times teaching that is out there for much of it appears to be aimed at getting us alarmed.

Alarm is a type of fear often caused by surprise and so Paul wanted them to know about the end times so that they would not be alarmed when things came to pass.

For the result of being alarmed and worried is that we become ineffective for the Lord

We know that we need to stop ourselves being ineffective by developing the qualities given in 2 Peter 1 – Faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. Much better things to spend your time on rather than trying to predict the unpredictable.

And in verse 15

2 Thessalonians 2:15 (ANIV)

¹⁵ *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.*

I have spoken often of the need to stand firm and we need to hold onto the teachings we have been given for they are there to help us to lead the Godly lives that we are called to.

But that verse started with a “*So then*” so what preceded it?

2 Thessalonians 2:14 (ANIV)

¹⁴ *He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The “*This*” it refers to is being saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and your belief in the Truth. Salvation is a two part process - it can only be achieved by the Spirit because we know that we cannot save ourselves because that would require works and we do not earn our salvation. We do works because of our salvation not to earn it.

The second part is that you must believe in the gospel. If you do not accept the Truth of God’s word and so the Lord Jesus’ sacrifice to allow us to be saved then you cannot be saved. You must believe the truth that you have heard preached to you many times here and elsewhere.

Always, of course, testing that preaching against the word of God revealed to us in the bible.

But look at the outcome spoken to us through verse 14 – *that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is no mean spirited religion that only gives you a chance of something after death. Our faith gives us the assurance that not only **will** we get to heaven but that we shall **share** in the glory of Christ.

I can only begin to imagine what that will be like. The saints that have gone before us are even now revelling in that glory and we shall share with them either when we die or, if it comes first, when we are taken up to join with them at Jesus’ second coming.

So the beginning and end of this chapter tell us why we have all this teaching on the end times and the second coming while warning us that we do not know the date and so must live in expectation.

We must not allow all that is going on and false teachers to unsettle us and alarm us for that would distract us from our primary aim here of living the life and living it to the full.

We must not let anyone deceive us on this or any issue because we know false teachers will come to deceive us and so we must know the truth and hang on to it. This is something we

must do ourselves in that relying on others to know the truth will not help us. Others can help us to know the truth and explain it to us but we must know the truth and hold fast to it.

In doing that we hold firm to the truth of God passed on to us through the teachings we have in the bible explained to us in sessions such as this but always checking back to the revealed word of God so that we know we are not being deceived.

And because of all this we share in the glory of Jesus Christ both now on this earth and in the eternity to follow. That glory we have through the Spirit that makes us stand out in the world and so is part of our witness to the world.

And then to finish his chapter we have this wonderful blessing:

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

Through God's grace we have the good hope that I have already spoken of – that sure and solid hope of our eternal salvation.

But did you see what else we get in this package “*eternal encouragement*”. The whole gospel is there to encourage us on every step we take in our walk of faith as individuals and together as part of the body of Christ here and throughout our land and the world.

We should never be discouraged because we have an eternal encouragement that the world chooses not to have. That encouragement is there to strengthen us in every good deed and word.

I speak frequently on the good deeds that God has prepared for us to do but I was encouraged by that good word in the final verse.

We know that we will have to give an answer for every word we speak for Matthew tells us that Jesus said

Matthew 12:36 (ANIV)

³⁶ *But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.*

But we have been called and are strengthened in every good word that we speak.

Doesn't that encourage you?

When you open your mouth and speak out the gospel of love God himself is strengthening us to do this.

So have I explained why there is so much teaching on the end times in the New and Old Testament?

It is not there to encourage us in navel gazing but is there to encourage us to speak out and to live our lives to the full in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

These words were written to a Church that was starting to fear the end times and the complexity of them. They expected the second coming but were concerned for those who had already died and did not understand how it could all fit together.

Concerns we share and those who do these detailed studies of the end times show how concerned we can be.

But all of this teaching is there for some very simple purposes;

- That we should not be unsettled or alarmed by these things
- That we should stand firm on the teachings we have
- That we might be encouraged and strengthened in every good word and deed.

In summary these teachings are written to a church that is in fear of the end times and they are written to give the Church hope.

So whenever you come across and consider these teachings always remember the simple phrase which could be applied to all of the teachings of the bible:

They are there to give you hope and not fear.

