

SERMON – PASTOR GREG

13.11.2022

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in the End Times- are we ready? Let us pray.

In Acts 16 we hear how God led Paul to preach the Good News in Europe: *Paul and his companions travelled throughout (northern Turkey) ...When they came to the border of Mysia (western Turkey) they tried to enter...but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to...During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we (Luke and Silas) got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God called us to preach the gospel to them.*

After a wonderful but terrifying time in Philippi *they came to Thessalonica*. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia with about 200,000 citizens, mainly of Greek and Roman descent and culture. There were also Jewish people there: *As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath Days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." Some of the Jewish people were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.*

It seems that this all happened about 51 AD- about 20 years after our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection and ascension. After a short time however Paul was forced to leave and continued on to Athens and Corinth. But Paul did not forget about the brand new church in Thessalonica and he wrote at least two letters to them.

In his first letter he focussed on the return of Christ when the Son of God would rescue, reward, perfect, resurrect and sanctify all those who had declared their faith in him. So confident were some of those early Christians of Christ's imminent return they began to stop working. Why should they go through all that drudgery because Jesus is about to return- today, this week or maybe next week? So Paul also challenged them to trust in the Second Coming but also to keep living the holy life until Christ returned- and this holy life included working:

1 Thess 4:11: *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.* We too are called to live holy lives and in doing so- win the respect of those outside the church.

1 Thess 5:14: *And we urge you, brothers (and sisters), warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

But persecution and a false belief that Christ was soon to return caused Paul to write another letter and again addressing those who had given up work: *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers (and sisters) to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.... When we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.' We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy, they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you brothers, never tire of doing what is right.*

So what do we take from these words?

Church discipline. *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers (and sisters) to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us...* These are hard words indeed. Keep away from those who refuse to work for their living. And keep away from those who do not hold to the teaching they had received. We live

in increasingly difficult and dangerous times. But our enemy does not come to us in an obvious way like the Russians invading Ukraine. Our enemy is far subtler. During the week I was watching Paul Murray on Sky news. He was complaining that many politicians get caught up in issues that are not really that important. South Australian Liberal Senator Alex Antic used Senate estimates on Tuesday to question ABC boss David Anderson about an episode of Play School Story Time read by well-known drag queen Courtney Act. The episode featured the book *The Spectacular Suit* where a girl rejects her mother's request to wear a dress on her birthday because she wants to wear the spectacular suit. If that was not bad enough, another commentator on the same show said that surely all Australians would accept this- it is okay for a man dressed up as a showgirl to read a book on Playschool- a book which says it is acceptable for young children to decide who they are and how they are to dress. And this society- our society- has infiltrated the church in so many ways. We hear the constant call to accept all views and ways of life. Otherwise we are called racist bigots and worse. And so our church accepts much that previous generations would not have accepted. We rarely practice church discipline at all.

Work. I mentioned last week that I expect that we will be working in heaven. Certainly we will be singing praises to God. We will be enjoying the rewards of our earthly labour. We will be ruling with Christ. We will be enjoying the heavenly banquet. And I expect we will be working. But the work we do in heaven will not be tainted by the sin of Adam- it will be God pleasing, satisfying, rewarding and challenging. But even here on earth we have work to do. And as Paul wrote: *If a man will not work, he shall not eat.* But there is a challenge in our work- what are we working for? For what we need or for what the world tells us we need? But apparently there were some early Christians in Thessalonica who had decided to give up on work and be busybodies instead. Disrupting others in various ways. So Paul wrote stern words to them, "Get back to work" and they did not or if they were ignoring the teaching they had received the rest of the church was to avoid them.

Is this what we are called to do in the face of false teaching and lazy or sinful Christians? Exclude them and have nothing to do with them? Yes and No. Yes- for a while this is what the church is called to do but only to bring them back to Christ and his way of living: *If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.* The church should only practice exclusion- excommunication- in order to bring an unrepentant sinner to his knees- to confession- so that he might be forgiven and restored.

Jesus will return. Why did some of those early Christians give up working? Because they fully believed that the Son of God was about to return and very, very soon. How many of us really believe that Christ Jesus will return today? Or tomorrow? Or next week? The church has been proclaiming his Second Coming for two thousand years but he has not yet returned. You and I might believe it but many in the church- it would seem-do not really believe it. They are like the ten virgins who fell asleep without the oil. So many of those who have been baptised and confirmed have fallen asleep- asleep to God and His Son. They are too busy or worship is too boring- or the church is too out of touch....and the list goes on and on. We pray that they will awake before it is too late.

We are living in the End Times- the signs are all around us- but they have been so ever since the time of Christ. These signs call us- you and me- to repent, to trust, to obey and to work until Christ returns. And the greatest work we can do is to believe in the One that God has sent (John 6:29). Amen.