

(Through the Bible) 1 & 2 Thessalonians

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon on 1 & 2 Thessalonians emphasizes the importance of true repentance, the role of persecution in ministry, and the relationship between love and holiness in preparation for Christ's return.

Duration: 56:16

Topics: "Second Coming", "Spiritual Readiness"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of being prepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the need to be diligent in our faith amidst persecution, to discern truth from deception, and to work diligently in serving the Lord. It highlights the characteristics of the Antichrist, the necessity of loving the truth, and the significance of being sanctified and ready for the glorious return of Jesus.

Transcript

Okay, let's turn this morning to 1 Thessalonians. Even though false letters in the Bible are beginning with Romans and ending with 2 Timothy, as far as we know, they were not written in that order. There are certain indications in some letters that as to the time in which they were written, Paul was probably converted about six years after Jesus died and rose again.

And this was probably Paul's first letter in all the letters that are in the Bible, written probably about 15 or 16 years after his conversion. And maybe five years or so after he had started his first missionary journey in Acts 13. So 1 and 2 Thessalonians were, as far as we know, the first letters that Paul wrote.

And if you'd like to know the order in which I think the other letters were written, it's Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, then Galatians, then 1 and 2 Corinthians, then Romans, and then we have four letters that were written in prison. Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. When you read those four letters, remember they were written from prison.

It'll give you more light on those letters. And then we have the last three letters, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy was definitely his last.

So that's the order in which they were written. And it's very interesting that the very first letter that Paul writes deals so much with the second coming of Christ. The subject is basically being ready for Christ's return.

And this church was a persecuted church, and Paul was prepared to minister to this church by being persecuted in Philippi just before he came there. I mentioned how we have to be mini forerunners for other people. You cannot encourage a persecuted church if you have not been persecuted yourself.

And I look at it like this, that God knew that the church in Thessalonica was going to suffer a lot of persecution. So before God sent Paul to Thessalonica, what did he do? He allowed Paul to be imprisoned in Philippi. You read that in Acts 16.

And he went through some persecution there, and then he went to Thessalonica. So he was fresh from an experience of persecution. And then later on when the Thessalonian Christians were persecuted, they realized that the great apostle who came and gave us the gospel and established the church was persecuted himself.

So when God prepares you for a ministry, and he knows what that church is going to face over there, he will prepare you by making you go through the same thing so that you can minister to those people in that church in a powerful way and not just in theory. So don't be surprised at the things God takes you through. That is a preparation for your ministry in the days to come.

And here he speaks of their faith, love, and hope in verse 3, their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. And in the closing verses of that chapter 1, he mentions what true repentance is. This is one of the clearest definitions of true repentance in any of the verses of scripture.

It says that when they themselves report to us, that means the others who heard the word of God from you, how you turn to God from idols. So repentance is if you're facing idols, you turn around to God. When you're living in sin, you're facing idols with your back to God.

Your idol could be yourself, could be a girlfriend, could be money, it could be a job, it could be your ambition, it could be just sinful pleasure, and it could be visible idols too. There are many idols. All repentance is a turning from all those idols right around to God so that your back is to those idols.

Now, a person who has not turned his back to these idols that I just mentioned hasn't really repented. See, some people are trying to face God and at the same time face their idols. They have got a lot of interests and ambitions in the world and they also want Christianity.

They are the most unhappy people in the world. The people who live totally for these idols of pleasure and money, they are very happy. And the people who live totally for God, they are supremely happy.

But the most miserable people in the world are those who try to live for both. It's like keeping your foot in two boats and the boats are going in different directions. It splits you right in the middle.

So, a lot of problems that people face in their Christian life, I said the other day, is because of a lack of a proper foundation. And repentance is one of those essential foundations in the Christian life. And it must be total if it is to be effective.

So we need to examine our life and see if there is anything, an idol is anything in our life that takes the place of God. It could be a Christian leader. He could be your idol.

It could be, you know, some people make an idol of a certain doctrine. They are always talking about that. So, we must make sure that we don't worship anything other than the one living and true God.

And once you turn to God, it says in verse 9, we turn from idols to serve Him. To worship Him, to serve Him. We don't just turn.

No, the rest of our life, if you are truly repented, is to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven. Now, here is a perfect description of what repentance and faith is. This is conversion.

And a person who has been converted like this, we can say, has got a good foundation. He's given up all his idols, turned his back to them. He's put money in its proper place, comfort in its proper place, sleep in its proper place, food in its proper place, everything on earth in its proper place, the opinion of people in their proper place.

And he's turned to God and he says, my life is to serve God. You may be in a secular job, but repentance still means that your primary aim in life is to serve God. And you keep on serving, not without any expectancy of anything, but we do expect and wait for the second coming of Jesus from heaven.

When Jesus comes, He's going to deliver us, verse 10, from the wrath to come. So it's good for all of us to check whether our experience is corresponding to verse 9 and 10. In chapter 2, Paul reminds them, you know, you fellows are being persecuted, but you know, brethren, when we came to you, we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, verse 2. And as you know, we had the boldness to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

And if you read in the Acts of the Apostles, you'll find the opposition they faced. And in spite of all that opposition, Paul proclaimed the gospel. And there he was an example to the Thessalonians of one who was not afraid to preach the gospel, lest he be persecuted.

That was a great testimony. And he says there, our exhortation doesn't come from error or impurity or by way of deceit. And notice what he says in something about his ministry, which we should take heed to.

We preached, verse 4, we spoke not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. See, that's a good word for anyone who preaches the gospel. Or who preaches any type of preaching or teaching of the word.

To always be able to say, we're not speaking to please anybody sitting here. We're speaking to please almighty God who has entrusted us with the gospel. And God examines our hearts, it says in verse 4, to see whether we preach in a way that's pleasing to him.

Paul was telling the Thessalonians, this is how I preach to you, and this is how you must preach to other people. Paul emphasized that to the Galatians too. He was frequently emphasizing the fact that he never sought to please men.

It's one of the fundamental requirements. To seek the honor of men is a sin that is not recognized in Christendom sufficiently. We recognize other sins, but we don't recognize this terrible sin of doing something to seek the honor of some man.

It's a very serious sin. Because we saw in Galatians 1.10 that such a person can never be a servant of Christ. So, then he says in our speech, verse 5, we never flattered anybody.

We never said anything to please somebody sitting there, or somebody sitting there, or some rich person, or some influential person. We never flattered anybody. When we spoke to people individually, we didn't

use flattering words.

There's a lot of use of flattering words by preachers to rich people and influential people to try and butter them so that they can get some help from them when they need that help. A servant of God will never flatter. The other thing we read about the ministry here is we never preached anything in order to make money, verse 5, nor with a pretext for greed.

You know, people can preach in such a way that underneath they are motivated by greed. For example, you go into a certain place and you know that if you preach in a certain way they'll be happy and give you a good offering. But if you preach the whole truth, the way God wants you to speak, you may get nothing.

You may get a kick in the pants, perhaps. And so you don't want that. So, you speak in a way that pleases people.

We must examine our motives. And then he says in our preaching, verse 6, we did not seek glory from you or from others. Another thing he says, we did not assert our authority over you, even though as apostles, verse 6, we could have.

See, there are a number of verses here that teach us how we should serve the Lord. It's a beautiful passage. I believe anyone who serves the Lord must meditate on this passage.

Not pleasing men, not with flattery, no desire for money, not seeking glory from people, and not asserting our authority. You know, a lot of creatures just impose themselves and assert their authority. And in contrast to all these things he did not do, these are all a lot of negative things.

Not pleasing men, not with flattery, not with greed, not seeking glory, not asserting our authority. Okay. Now he says a couple of, a few positive things as to how he ministered and served among them.

First of all, as a gentle nursing mother cares for her own children. You know, like a nursing mother who's just had a baby and feeds that baby he says that's how he cared for you. A true servant of God must be like a mother to people.

You know how a mother treats a baby gently? That's how we are to serve. And then he says in verse 8, we had a fond affection for you. No man is fit to speak God's word to people unless he has a great love for the people whom he's speaking to.

He doesn't have a real love for the people in his heart. I say forget it. Don't preach.

Go and do some other job. And here's another positive thing. He says we wanted to give you not only the gospel of God, verse 8, but we wanted to give you our lives.

What an example. We didn't want to just give you a message. We wanted to pour out our life to serve you.

And verse 9 he says, you know how we worked hard night and day. A true servant of God must be a hard working person. Working night and day so that we don't become a financial burden on you.

See a lot of full-time workers in our country today are not really doing much most of the day. They go in the evenings here and there for some meetings and many of them just sleep and lull around in bed during the day. And they call themselves full-time workers.

They're not full-time. They're just evening workers. Full-time workers are those who are doing a secular job and after they finish their secular job they go and do something for the Lord.

Now that's not how Paul was. Paul was working night and day and he found something to do and when he had spare time he said, well I can do something with my hands and earn my living so that even though I do get a little support from here and there I don't want to be a burden to people. This man was so upright.

And he says there how devoutly, verse 10, uprightly, blamelessly we behave towards you believers. Wherever Paul went he was always saying it's not just my message. It's the way I live that demonstrates the gospel.

What a need there is for Christian workers in India to be able to say that. It's not just our message. It's the way we live that demonstrates the truth of the gospel.

And he goes on to say it's not only as a mother, verse 11, he says we also exhorted you, rebuked you and encouraged you and implored you as a father. So we see a true servant of God is a mother and a father. You know, the mother treating the baby gently and the father giving advice and discipline.

Both are necessary in a true servant of God or an elder of a church. I would encourage anyone who wants to serve the Lord to read verse 4 to 11 and meditate on these negatives and positives deeply. I've just shown them to you and if you are serious you can meditate on this yourself and see how you should serve the Lord.

And then we move on to verse 18. Paul says he says about all the opposition he faced from different people and then he says in verse 18 more than once I wanted to come to you but Satan hindered me, thwarted my purpose. Now, think of that.

We've often said, it's true, that Satan was defeated on the cross, his armor was taken away, he has no power over us, Jesus has given us authority, Luke 10, 19, over all the power of the enemy and Paul was certainly an outstanding servant of God. But yet, he says here that Satan hindered him at a certain point. He wanted to go to Thessalonica and Satan hindered him.

We know in 2 Corinthians he speaks about a messenger of Satan that was constantly troubling him. See, Paul was such an outstanding servant of God that Satan was after him more than anybody else in the world. He may have sent his junior demons after other Christian workers but he was himself after Paul.

And I can imagine that whoever is the most outstanding servant of God in the world today, Satan will be after him personally and he will send his junior demons after the other Christian workers. And among the demons also there are different levels of power. It says principalities and powers and all that.

So, the stronger demons will go after the more outstanding Christian workers and the weaker demons will be sent after the other Christian workers and the useless Christian workers, he'll just leave them alone because he knows that they won't harm his kingdom at all. See, some Christian workers running after money, the devil will say, just leave him alone. He'll just destroy himself and destroy other people.

Forget about him. So, it's a great honor that if Satan thinks that you are worthy to be persecuted and harassed and troubled, that means he considers you to be a danger to his kingdom. I believe it's good to seek that honor that Satan considers you to be a threat to his kingdom.

Satan was after Paul and he hindered him from going somewhere, but that did not hinder God's purpose. Just like the thorn in the flesh did not hinder God's purpose, even though it is a messenger from Satan, it fulfilled God's purpose by keeping Paul humble. So, even this hindering of Paul did not hinder God's purpose because he says, chapter 3, verse 2, we sent Timothy and Timothy came and he came back, verse 6, after visiting you and he brought us good news of your faith and love and we were greatly comforted when we heard about that.

So, see, when Paul could not go, Timothy went and that was good because that gave Timothy some experience in the ministry and it brought Timothy to some maturity, which is a good thing. Sometimes it's a good thing if a senior worker does not go and a junior worker goes and gets some experience. So, did Satan succeed there? No! God turned the tables on Satan like he always does, that when he stopped Paul something better happened that Timothy went and the ministry was fulfilled and not only the ministry was fulfilled, Timothy got some experience.

So, what do we see from that? That in our ministry, if we live in the will of God, nothing that the devil can do can ever hinder God's purpose for our life. Let me move on to chapter 3, verse 12 and 13. There are a number of expressions there of his great joy in them, in chapter 2, verse 19 and chapter 3, verse 9, where he says, my greatest joy is found in you people, you Corinthians, you Thessalonians.

He found his joy in the believers and I feel that a servant of God who does not find joy in those whom he serves, something is wrong with him. So many people serve in a grumpy, long-faced type of way. We need to find joy in those we serve.

In verse 12 and 13, we have a beautiful expression that teaches us what true holiness is. Just read verse 12 and 13 together and then you'll understand what true holiness is. May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, just as we also do for you, so that, why should you increase and abound in love for one another? Because that is the only way he can establish your hearts unblameable in holiness.

So what is holiness? Holiness is increasing in love for one another. That's what it says there. You cannot be established unblameable in holiness if you don't increase in love for one another.

Now that's a very important corrective for people who think that holiness has got nothing to do with other people, it's just got to do with me. You know, a lot of people who pursue holiness in the world today, they're just careful about their dress and simple dress and try to keep their thoughts and eyes and tongue and all pure and they are so selfish. Utterly selfish.

They're only thinking of their own purity. And they don't have a concern for other people. They don't have a love.

They're not growing in love for other people. Such people are not holy. They are Pharisees.

If you don't increase in love for other people, according to this verse, Almighty God can never establish you unblameable in holiness. Meditate on that verse. Don't think there's any holiness which does not make you increase in love for others.

It's a counterfeit holiness. True holiness is love. Love for God and love for our fellow believers and for all men.

And if we continue in this, one day when the Lord comes, it says in verse 13, He'll establish us unblameable at the coming of our Lord Jesus. That's what He's speaking about. This epistle is preparing people for the coming of the Lord Jesus with all His saints.

And again in chapter 4, verses 1 to 8, He's speaking about purity in the sexual area. Verse 4 could be translated in two ways. Each of you must know how to possess His own body in sanctification and honor.

That could be one translation where you must know how to keep your body holy and pure. That's your responsibility. Because verse 3, this is the will of God.

Your sanctification. There are many areas where we don't know God's will. But here is one area where we definitely know God's will.

We don't have to find it. Your total sanctification. Sanctification means separation from everything that is sinful, worldly, evil.

And each of you must know how to keep your own body pure. Another way we could translate verse 4 is, each of you must know how to acquire His own wife in sanctification and honor. That means the way you get your wife must be in a holy way.

Everybody must know how to get a wife in a holy way. There are a lot of unholy ways in which people try to get wives. By looking for dowry, for example.

That's one of those unholy ways. Each of you must know how to get a wife in a holy way. Did you get your wife in a holy way? Are you looking for a wife in a holy way? Or are you looking at unholy, earthly considerations when you look for a wife? And certainly not in lustful passion.

Verse 5. Like the heathen. When your desire for a wife is because she's attractive and you've got a lust for her, that's not the way to look for a wife. If you're a servant of God, if you're one who wants to live for God, you must look for a wife who's got a godly desire.

That's a very important word. And then it says here in verse 6 that no one should ever cheat his brother in this matter. That means, don't fool around with somebody else's wife.

Because God is the avenger of people who do these things. If you ever try to get friendly with somebody else's wife, I tell you God will take revenge on you in some amazing way and make you an example to everybody else. We've got to be very, very careful in this area of sexual relationships in relationships with the opposite sex.

And particularly because we live in a society like the Thessalonians lived in a society where sexual immorality was not considered serious. There's a lot of it going on even in our country in the colleges among young people. And outside, there's a lot of it among Christian workers in all denominations.

And it's essential that we become different. That we have a clear testimony. Every single person has got to know how to preserve his body in purity in this area.

Otherwise you'll just fail as a servant of God. Samson is an outstanding example. And many, many others in the last 50 years around the world.

And he goes on to say, verse 11, make it your ambition to lead a quiet life to mind your own business, to work with your own hands just as we commanded you. That's a good verse. We saw in 2 Corinthians 5, our ambition is to please God.

And this does not contradict that ambition. Our ambition must be to lead a quiet life where we don't fight and quarrel with anybody. To mind my own business instead of being a busy body in other people's affairs.

So many believers are interfering in the affairs of other people. And to work with my own hands as far as possible to earn my own living. Verses 13 to 18, he speaks about how it'll be when Jesus comes.

He says, we don't want you to be uninformed as to what's happened to those people who have slept in the Lord. That means those who have died in Christ. That Jesus died and rose again.

So we believe that these people who died in Christ will also rise again and God will bring them with Jesus. That when Jesus comes we who are alive will not go before those who are dead in Christ before us. We will go together with them.

They will rise from the graves and that will be the first resurrection and we will go to meet the Lord. The unbelievers will not rise for another thousand years. They'll rise in the second resurrection.

But we who have died trusting in the Lord will rise up together to meet the Lord in the air. And those who are alive will be caught up. Verse 17 and we will meet the Lord in the air.

Now notice verse 16 and 17. What are the things that he said are going to be there at the coming of the Lord? The Lord will descend with a shout. The voice of the archangel.

The trumpet of God. And then all the saints will be caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds. Now if you turn to what Jesus said in Matthew 24.

He spoke about these very same things when he was on earth and he spoke to his disciples. In Matthew chapter 24 he said about his coming. It'll be like this.

Don't believe people who say he's here or he's there or he has come secretly or any such thing. Verse 26 There is no secret coming. When he comes it'll be like the lightning flashing from the east to the west.

And when will his coming take place? Matthew 24 29 Immediately after the tribulation. Not before. Now I know some of you or perhaps many of you believe it is before but I believe what Jesus said.

It is after the tribulation. And what's going to happen after the tribulation? The sign of the son of man will appear in the sky. Verse 30.

The last part he will come in the clouds. That's what he read in 1 Thessalonians 4. There'll be a trumpet. Verse 31.

That's what he read in 1 Thessalonians 4. And the angels will go and gather the elect from one end of the sky to the other. We are the elect. When is all this going to take place? 1 Thessalonians 4 which we read.

Matthew 24 29 Immediately after the tribulation. So there's a period of tribulation. Immediately after that it's so clear for me.

For many years I believed that Jesus would come before because I was young. I didn't study the scriptures. I just believed what everybody else said.

But I decided to believe scripture and not what everybody says. And this is what I believe today. That 1 Thessalonians 4 is exactly what Jesus said there in Matthew 24.

Now 1 Thessalonians 5 He says, you know that the day of the Lord, verse 2, will come like a thief in the night. Now many people quote this verse. Jesus is coming like a thief in the night.

But he says verse 4, you are believers. He's not coming for you like a thief in the night. Do you know that he's not coming for me like a thief in the night? If he's coming like a thief in the night for you, you must be an unbeliever.

When a thief comes in the night, he doesn't give an announcement, I'm coming tomorrow night at 12.30 at night or anything. He just comes suddenly. And who's the one who's not expecting him? The unbelievers.

I'm expecting him. So because I'm expecting him, he's not coming like a thief in the night for me. So verse 4 makes that very, very clear.

Because you are sons of light. I'm not living in the darkness. It's people who live in the darkness for whom Jesus comes as a thief in the night.

So spiritually, let us not sleep. But let us be alert. What is the difference between sleeping and awake? Being awake.

When we sleep, please listen, the things that are real around us seem unreal. I don't know what's happening. I don't know who's in the room.

I don't know what's happening in the world around me. And the things that are unreal in my dreams appear real. That is sleep.

Sleep is a time when the unreal things appear real and the real things appear unreal. And a believer, we can say is spiritually asleep when the real things of eternity are unreal to him and the unreal things of the world are real to him. That means this world is like a dream and that is more real to him than the real things of eternity.

Such a brother or sister is fast asleep. For him, the Lord will definitely come as a thief in the night. But spiritually, a man who's alert, for whom the things of eternity are real, he's not going to be caught unawares when Christ comes.

He's ready. And so he says, we look forward to that day and we wait for his coming. And people around us, verse 3, will say peace and safety.

That's what the world is. All the governments in the world are looking for peace and safety but suddenly destruction will come. And we are ready for that.

We are ready for the tribulation. It says here like birth pangs upon a woman with child, verse 3. Now every woman knows that before she gives birth to a child, there's a period of a number of hours of what they call labor of the preparation for the delivery of the child which is a very painful process. I've heard women say that sometimes they feel like dying.

It's so painful. And then the child is born. And there, the Holy Spirit is picturing the tribulation before the coming of Christ.

There's going to be a painful time and then the child is born, the coming of Christ. Everything in scripture points to that. Even Jesus said it.

These are the beginning of birth pangs. No child is born without those birth pangs and the coming of the Lord is not going to be without this period of painful tribulation for God's people. We're not afraid of that because I think it's a great honor if the Lord will allow us to be here, to be witnesses for Him and to lay down our lives for the sake of the Gospel.

In chapter 5, he says in verse 12, you must appreciate those who diligently labor among you. Here's a verse that tells us that we must highly appreciate those who are our elders and who preach and teach us God's word, especially those who give you instruction. Verse 13, esteem them very highly in love.

I'm sorry to say that many Christians because they swing to the other extreme of not worshiping messengers. They don't even esteem the Lord's messengers highly in love. That is their loss.

It's not the Lord's messenger who's going to lose. If you disobey a command, you're the loser. And then in verse 14 onwards, he gives a number of exhortations.

Admonish those who are unruly. Encourage those who are faint-hearted. Help the weak.

Be patient with all men. Don't repay anybody evil for evil. Always seek what is good for others.

Rejoice always. Pray always. That means have a spirit of prayer all the time.

In everything, give thanks, for all of this is God's will for you. Here's some practical advice that you could spend a lot of time meditating on to be ready for the coming of the Lord. Then he says something about spiritual gifts.

Don't quench the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit of God is prompting you to serve Him in some way, don't pour water on that fire. Don't quench it.

Do something. Respond to the Holy Spirit. Don't despise prophetic utterances.

Don't make fun of prophecies. But at the same time, don't believe the whole thing. Examine everything carefully and see whether it is true and hold on to what is good.

Throw away the rest. And abstain from every form of evil. And if you do this, the God of peace will sanctify you, make you perfectly holy in spirit, soul, and body and preserve you for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the theme. Being prepared and preserved for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in verse 23, this is the one verse in the New Testament, and perhaps in the whole Bible, that teaches us that man is a trinity, just like God.

Spirit, soul, and body. Because man is the tabernacle of God and the tabernacle, as we saw, had three parts. Most holy place, holy place, outer court.

Man is spirit, soul, and body. God dwelt in the most holy place. God dwells in the spirit.

And that is the most important part of us. Our body, we can see, our soul consists of our intelligence, that's our mind, our emotions, and our will. And the spirit consists of our conscience and the ability to receive God's life.

So that's the first letter. We now move on to the second letter of Thessalonians, the Paul to the Thessalonians, which is also dealing again with the subject of the second coming of Christ, probably written about a year after the first letter. But here, the first letter was comforting them concerning the coming of the Lord.

Here, the second letter is correcting them because they had some wrong ideas about the second coming of Christ. We need to be comforted with the thought of the second coming of Christ, and we also need to be corrected when we have wrong ideas about the second coming of Christ. You see, what happened was, in the first letter, Paul said, well, the coming of the Lord is there, it's coming, so be prepared for it.

And what some people did was, oh, the Lord is coming, why are we wasting our time working? Let's resign our jobs, and let's be ready for the coming of the Lord. And they were sitting around doing nothing. And Paul said, that's not what I meant, that you just sit around waiting for the coming of the Lord.

Even in the last few years, we read in the paper sometimes of some crazy cult group somewhere believes that the Lord is coming on such and such a date, and they wait on top of some mountain, resign all their jobs, and the leader of that group makes all that money from them, from these people who sell their property and give it to him. So he profits from the whole thing. And then they wait there, and they find the Lord hasn't come.

We don't know the date or the hour of His coming, Jesus said that. No man knows of the day or the hour. We can know when it is near.

We know that Israel has come back into the land, so we know the coming of the Lord is near. We know there's a lot of strife around Jerusalem, so we know the coming of the Lord is near, but we don't know the day or the hour. It's not for us to know the times or seasons, so it's not for us to go and wait on some mountain or resign our jobs and say we don't know when the Lord is coming.

Rather, we know the Lord is coming now, so we just wait for Him. I don't know when He'll come. He said He's coming, and two thousand years have gone by, and all those people in Thessalonica, if they had been waiting without a job, they'd have been without a job forever.

So, we must not be foolish like those people. In chapter one, he encourages them again to be faithful in tribulation. He says, we speak proudly of you, verse 2, 2 Thessalonians 1, 4, for your perseverance in the midst of all your persecutions, and your faithfulness and perseverance in the midst of your persecution, verse 5, is a clear proof that you are worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering.

It's a clear proof of God's righteous judgment on those other people, and it's righteous for God, one day, to punish all those people who are persecuting you with affliction and judgment, and to you, when Jesus comes again, you'll get relief. Now, that teaches us that persecution will continue until, verse 7, the coming of Christ. We get relief from persecution only finally when Jesus comes.

Now, when Paul wrote that, he did not know that 2,000 years of church history is going to be filled with persecution. He was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he said, relief will come only when Christ comes again. And we have seen that that is true.

Even today, people are being persecuted, and I have read statistics that more people have been killed for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in the last hundred years than in all the years, all the 1,900 years before, and I can believe that. A lot of those things don't get publicized, but I think a lot of people in the last hundred years have got the honor, the privilege of dying as a martyr for Jesus Christ. So, that relief will come only when Christ comes again with His mighty angels, and that time, He will deal out judgment, verse 8, on those who don't know God and don't obey Christ.

And they will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, and He will come to be glorified in His saints, verse 10. So, we cannot expect in our service for the Lord, until Christ comes, to be free from persecution. You'll be persecuted by your relatives, you'll be persecuted by Christians, you'll be persecuted by non-Christians.

That's our lot. Because we are like a fish out of water. This is not our home.

This world is not our home, and that's why we are in conflict with this world system. We are strangers and foreigners, and we are a threat to this world system. And the ruler of this world, the devil hates us.

And that's why we are persecuted. If you become friendly with this world, and with the ruler of this world, he'll stop troubling you. But then you won't be a witness for Christ.

In chapter 2, he gives that word of correction. He says, we want to tell you something about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our being gathered up to meet Him. Don't be quickly shaken from your composure, or disturbed, either by a spirit, or a message, or a letter, as if it has come from us.

That means, don't let anybody come and tell you, I got a message from the Lord, or I saw a vision, and this is what the Lord told me about His coming. Don't believe all that. There are lots of that happening today in the world.

People are talking about visions, and about this, that, and the other, about the coming of the Lord. Don't believe all that. You've got the word, that's enough for you.

And, don't be shaken. And there were some people who were writing letters, and signing Paul, to make people feel that Paul wrote that letter. Imagine, these things were going on in the first century.

See, because those days, as I said, they didn't have a Bible. And, this is probably one of the first books of the New Testament written. One, Thessalonians.

And, somebody else writes something and says Paul, and some people were thinking, this is a real letter from Paul, and it shook them up, what that fellow wrote. So, he says, don't believe it. That's why many times, Paul would himself sign the letter.

Somebody else would write it, and he would say, this is my signature, Paul. That's how I conclude all my letters. And, he says, don't let anybody disturb you, saying the day of the Lord has already come.

What's he saying? Oh, don't let anybody come and tell you, Jesus came secretly and He's gone. No, no, no. He says, it's not going to happen like that.

Because, that day cannot come until first a great falling away from the faith comes among Christians, and that's happening in our time, and the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, has to be revealed. That day will not come. Verse 3, Jesus will not come until the Antichrist comes first, and the period of tribulation.

Everywhere you look in Scripture, you get the same answer. Christ comes after the tribulation. And, the Antichrist will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called God and object of worship.

See, this is speaking about the day of the Lord. Now, some people try to split the coming of the Lord from the day of the Lord, and there are only clever ways you can twist Scripture to suit your own conviction. We must not come to Scripture with a preconceived idea and make Scripture fit my idea, because then God will allow us to be deceived.

We must come to Scripture with no ideas, and let our ideas be molded by Scripture. Then we will get the truth. Many of you, I fear, have already got an opinion in your mind, and then you come to the Scripture - that's how I was in my younger days, because I was young and I didn't know - and you come to the Scripture and make the Scripture, squeeze it, and make it fit your theological opinion.

You'll be deceived. Come to the Scripture with an open mind, and let your ideas be molded by Scripture. That's what I have decided to do, and I changed my view on this subject to fit in with Scripture.

And I saw that the Antichrist is going to rise first. But does that mean we are looking forward to tribulation? No. I'm looking forward to the coming of the Lord.

If you ask a pregnant mother, a pregnant wife, what are you looking forward to? Are you looking forward to the birth pains? She says, no, I'm looking forward to the birth of a baby. No mother is looking forward to the birth pains. Have you ever heard a mother saying, I'm looking forward to the birth pains? No.

She says, I'm looking forward to the birth of a baby. I know there'll be birth pains before that, but that's a short period. And you ask me, what am I looking forward to? Tribulation? Rubbish.

I'm looking forward to the coming of the Lord. I know there'll be a little period of pain before that. That's okay.

But I'm looking forward to the birth of the baby. The birth of a new kingdom on this earth. And so we look forward to that, but before that, there'll be the Antichrist who sits in the temple as God.

He gets people to worship him. And John says that spirit of the Antichrist is already in the world, where people sit in the church and make themselves like God to rule over people. But here's a characteristic of the Antichrist.

He sits like a God in the temple, in the church. And this is called the mystery of lawlessness, which is already at work. Verse 7. There is a mystery of lawlessness just like there's a mystery of godliness.

The mystery of godliness is that Christ came in the flesh. The mystery of lawlessness is Satan coming in the flesh. That is the Antichrist.

It's not that Satan becomes flesh, but Satan possesses this man. It's the opposite of Christ coming in the flesh. That's the mystery of lawlessness.

When Satan possesses a man and manifests his full evil to fight the fact that Jesus came in the flesh. And then that lawless one, it says in verse 8, will be revealed, whom the Lord will slay with the breath of his mouth when he comes again, and put an end to him. And his coming, he's describing this coming of the Antichrist, and before the person himself comes, there's going to be the spirit of that moving in the world, preparing the way for him, just like John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ.

Here's going to be a whole movement preparing the way for the Antichrist. And it says here that he's going to come with all types of wickedness, with powers and signs and false wonders. There's going to be all types of deceptive miracles.

And we see that in Christendom today. Lot of healing campaigns. There's a lot of deception goes on.

But not real miracles, not real healings. Counterfeit healings, counterfeit miracles. And the way is being prepared for the Antichrist.

False wonders, false signs are all being there to prepare people for the coming of the Antichrist. Now there are true wonders also. I believe Jesus heals the sick and does miracles today.

But there's a lot of counterfeit also and we need to discern between the two. And it says here that God will send a deluding influence, verse 11, on many many people because they did not love the truth, verse 10. So as to be saved.

And if in your life or mine I'm not willing to face up to the truth about myself when God shows it to me in a message or when I read the word, I don't want to be saved from the sin which God shows in me. This is the one verse in the Bible which says God himself will allow you to be deceived. What a tragic thing.

When God allows a person to be deceived. Satan is already deceiving us. Our lusts are full of deceit, the Bible says.

On top of that, if God also deceives us, we're finished. You better make sure at least God is on your side. You want God on your side? Love the truth about yourself.

When God shows you your sin, when God shows you your covetousness, when God shows you your selfishness, acknowledge it. When God shows you your love of money, acknowledge it. When God shows you your pride, acknowledge it.

Love the truth about yourself and say, I want to be saved from this Lord. If you defend yourself and cover up your sin, I guarantee God himself will send a deluding influence on you and you will believe what is false. You'll believe all these counterfeit miracles.

Why is it so many Christians believe counterfeit miracles today? I'll tell you the reason. Here's the answer. They don't want to be saved from sin in their own life.

They don't love the truth about sin in their own life. They don't love the truth about being saved from the things God shows them. But brethren, we give thanks for you because you were chosen for sanctification and here is the purpose with which God called us through the gospel.

Verse 14 is a beautiful verse that we may gain the glory of Jesus Christ. The whole purpose of the gospel is that I might acquire that glory of Jesus full of grace and truth one day. Then he says, may the Lord comfort you.

Hold fast to these traditions, verse 15, and don't stray from them. In chapter 3 he says, stay away from brothers who are living lazy lives. Verse 6 to 11 he says, you know how we lived when we were among you? Did we... Were we lazy? We worked hard.

We never took any money from any of you. It says in verse 8 even when you gave us food regularly, Paul, somebody supplied food regularly to Paul when he was in Thessalonica, he paid for it. Amazing man.

There are very few full-time workers who would think of paying for food. Paul says he did it. Not just for one meal.

Maybe somebody was supplying regularly on a monthly basis and he didn't want to take advantage of that brother who supplied him food every month, saying well I'm the Lord's servant, of course you've got to give me. He paid for that food. He was so upright.

And he worked night and day in order to pay for that food. He never took any money from those Thessalonians. Because he says, we wanted, we had a right, verse 9, to it.

But we wanted to be an example for you. A model for you. Verse 9. A Christian servant of the Lord must be a model for others.

To say to others, do what I did. I worked night and day to support myself. I want to give you an example.

Because we, he says, we have heard that some of you, verse 11, are leading such an undisciplined life. Acting as busybodies in other people's matters. We command you in the name of Jesus, verse 12, work quietly and eat your own bread.

And here's a law, verse 10. The last part. If a man does not work, he should not eat.

If you're serving the Lord, you should be working harder than all those people who work hard in a secular job. Please remember this. You may be in a situation where you cannot work with your hands and make tents and earn your living.

Never mind. Okay. Somebody's supporting you.

That's okay. But ask yourself this one question. Those people are working so hard from 9 o'clock in the morning till 5 or 6 in the evening to support you.

Do you work just as hard? Are you lazy? If you're lazy and you're not working hard morning till night, you have no right to get those people to work hard to support you. A servant of the Lord must be a hard-working person. That morning till night, he's got something to do for the Lord.

Then it's alright if other people support you because they're working less than you. They work 8 hours a day to support you and you should be working 10 hours perhaps, serving the Lord. But that's not how it is today.

Many people in secular work are working much harder than people in Christian work and that's the tragedy in Christendom in India today. Now there will be people who don't obey this instruction. Verse 14, the Lord Paul says, don't treat him as an enemy.

Take note of that man. Have no fellowship with him, verse 14. Don't associate with him.

Admonish him. And he signs his greeting in verse 17. May the Lord help us to think of these things seriously because these are important truths if we want to be ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

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