

# Overview

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good afternoon and welcome to this week's Lunchtime Bible Talk. Over the coming weeks, we're going to be spending our time looking at Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians.

Perhaps you could turn that up whilst I pray. Father, we thank you that we can join together this lunchtime as your people to sit under your word.

And we pray that you would help us to leave behind the distractions and the struggles and the pressures that we face throughout the week as we now spend time listening to you.

We pray that you would feed us today, that we'd be encouraged to do all that you've called us to do, that we would live lives that glorify you. So be with us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you've turned up to two Thessalonians, please put a finger in that. And then flick back to Acts chapter 17.

[ 1 : 09 ] That's on page 926, if you're using a church Bible. We'll come back to two Thessalonians, but we're going to read a few verses from Acts 17. Acts 17, verses 1 to 8.

Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom.

And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous. And taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.

And Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying, There is another king, Jesus.

[ 2 : 26 ] And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Turn back over to two Thessalonians.

We're going to read verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1, verses 16 and 17 of chapter 2. And then the last three verses in chapter 3. Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2, verse 16. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish or strengthen them in every good work and word.

And finally, chapter 3, verse 16 to 18. Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

[ 3 : 36 ] The Lord be with you all. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine. It is the way I write.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Amen. This is God's word. I have a friend who is highly suspicious of smartphones being able to track where you are.

So they always used to set their location setting to off so people didn't know where they were. That was until they started to drive. And then the lure and appeal of Google Maps and sat-nav changed things.

You see, a sat-nav can direct you at every turn on a journey and keep you on track to your destination. No need to argue with your wife. No need to argue with someone else in the car about whether it's a left turn or a right turn.

It's right there in front of you. Plow your way straight to your destination. Well, this week's sermon is an overview of the letter. And it's like getting the sat-nav ready as we head off on a journey through two Thessalonians.

[ 4 : 43 ] Doing this will keep us on track as we move through the letter. So we've seen from Acts that this was a church born in persecution. Paul spent a short time with them, but was driven out by those who opposed the gospel.

And so in this letter we see three key problems that they faced. But Paul is writing this letter chiefly to bring comfort and encouragement to the Thessalonians. The hinge at the heart of this letter can be seen in chapter 2, verses 16 to 17.

Paul prays that the Thessalonians would be comforted by the Lord who gives eternal comfort. And in 3.16, as Paul closes, he prays that this church would have peace.

A peace given from the Lord. So whilst this is a church that faces clear and obvious difficulties and problems, Paul is making it clear that they also have clear and obvious comforts, clear and obvious encouragements to keep going.

So let's look at these three problems. First, the Thessalonians faced suffering. Chapter 1 of this letter majors on this. Indeed, in Acts 17, it's made clear to us that this church was born in the midst of fierce persecution and suffering.

[ 6 : 00 ] It continues throughout the first letter that Paul wrote to the church. And now in 2 Thessalonians, it seems not just to be continuing, but getting worse. This is a church that faced real and difficult, painful opposition for believing in the Lord Jesus and for following him.

They were faced with the very real prospect of harm, even death. This young church was under attack in a real way. This was a church that faced suffering.

But Paul is writing to bring comfort. And so in the face of suffering, what he says is that there is real security in God's grace. There is security in God's grace.

The book begin and ends with that very word. Grace, chapter 1, verse 2. Paul begins with grace to you from God. And immediately afterwards, he moves on to deal with their sufferings.

He's reminding them first of grace before tackling what is very painful for them. Then in chapter 3, verse 18, he finishes again. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

[ 7 : 10 ] And then right at the heart of the letter, in 2.16, we read, Now may God who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts.

So in the face of persecution and suffering, to any Christian under pressure because the world around hates their Lord and hates their life, there is grace.

And this book is written to bring comfort to you. There is grace, great grace for us in the midst of suffering and trials. The suffering that this church faced was because in Acts 17, they turned the world upside down.

They challenged the established way. They provoked jealousy in the Jews. And they were seen to be acting against Caesar. They dared to say that there was another king.

They dared to say that Jesus is king. Whilst these pressures were 2,000 years ago, as Christians, we know these sorts of pressures are all too present today.

[ 8 : 16 ] The established authority for us isn't the Jewish religious leaders or a king like Caesar. But we do face pressure when we dare to challenge, for example, the religion of tolerance.

When we dare to make claims that Jesus is king, that his authority is to be listened to, that we're not autonomous, that the world around us, then the world around us is very quick to turn in on us.

If we don't bow down to the altar of tolerance, we will quickly feel the backlash. We'll be written off as bigots, as homophobes, all sorts of names for asserting that Jesus is king.

Just recently, for example, I read of churches being branded hate groups. What had they done? Had they been doing something malicious and horrible? No, they were branded hate groups for affirming traditional marriage.

Marriage as we have it in the Bible. Marriage as given by God. Similarly, it was in the news recently that Starbucks don't want the money of investors who support traditional marriage.

[ 9 : 22 ] If we assert that the Bible speaks with authority for all of humanity, then that means we will face opposition and varying degrees of suffering.

In holding to the scriptures and into Jesus' authority, we challenge all that the world around us loves. We challenge all that the world around us holds as their absolute authority. And so this is as relevant today as ever. Christians face real opposition and often fierce opposition just for being Christians.

Christians. How many of us know the sting of being ridiculed because we believe some outdated, misogynistic, bigoted faith? Or perhaps we're so aware of the backlash that might come our way that we're afraid to even have a voice in these things.

Imagine the teacher being persuaded to encourage the idea amongst young children that they can pick if they're going to be a boy or if they're going to be a girl. What happens when your livelihood, maybe even soon your safety, is threatened because you won't bow the knee to the altar of equality?

[10:33] When welcoming back Tommy as Tamara sits uncomfortably with you and mentioning it will only lead to all manner of nastiness in your direction.

Well, the truth is that Jesus is king. He is the risen and reigning Lord of creation. And this world is answerable to him. And his people will be recipients of opposition because of it.

But Paul tells us that there is security in that place because of God's grace. For chapter 1, verse 1, Paul writes to the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we have real comfort because our identity as God's people means we are truly joined to him.

The church is joined inseparably to our King and Lord. There is real security in God's grace because 2.16, we have been given through his grace an eternal comfort, an everlasting good hope. We can have clarity over our good hope because we know what Jesus' return will bring. It's worth clinging on to. Our Father knows the suffering that we face.

[11:55] He knows when we feel the very real opposition and vitriol. It comes with standing for him. It comes with acknowledging that Jesus is King. And in his gospel, he offers us real hope and great grace so that we can be secure.

His grace can and will keep us until that last glorious day when Jesus returns. And that brings us on to the second problem in Thessalonica.

That hope of what's going to happen in the future was what would keep them going. But Satan wants to rob us of that. They faced a very real challenge that Satan was spreading lies and confusion about Jesus' return.

Satan's deception is always going to be a threat to a church. So Paul is wanting the Thessalonians to know that in the face of his lies, that there is also Scripture and its certainty.

We don't have to be confused because we have Scripture with all of its certainty. The climax of the whole Bible story, the goal, the end of all that Christ is doing in the world, will be revealed when he returns.

[13:10] On that day, his people will be raised with him. On that day, true justice will be done. On that day, all that is wrong with the world will be made right. It is this real and wonderful hope that Christians have to keep us going.

We live lives now that look forward to that day in the future. It will make the struggles of this life now worth it. Knowing that is key.

Knowing that is clinging on to God's grace. It's what keeps us able to live a constant Christian life. So when Satan does whatever he can to undermine those gospel truths, to confuse and distort them, then it poses a real and dangerous problem for a church.

And that's what he was doing in Thessalonica. Paul wants Christians to know that in the face of Satan and his lies, we have scripture with our clarity, with our certainty, and with our assurance. Look at chapter 3, verse 17. Paul has written this greeting with his own hand so that they know what is genuine in anything that claims to be scripture.

[14:23] It seems that some of the problems in the Thessalonian church center on the mistaken idea that Jesus has already returned.

There even seems to be a letter claiming to be Paul's saying such things in chapter 2, verse 2. Paul warns the Thessalonians not to be shaken by any word or letter seeming to be from him that claims that Jesus has returned.

Paul wants them to know what and who you can be trusted. He wants Christians to have confidence in what is truly the word of God.

Paul and the other apostles have authority. They spoke and speak on behalf of God, just like the prophets of the Old Testament. Paul was carried along by the Holy Spirit, speaking with authority for the church.

His words here are God's words. And that is vital in the face of Satan as he sows his evil and lies. We need to have certainty about what is true.

[ 15 : 32 ] Satan will always want to rob Christians of their real hope. He'll want to confuse us. He'll want to make us believe that Jesus isn't coming back, that in the end it's not going to be worth it, that in the end it's not going to be okay.

He wants us to give up. He longs to deceive us. And even the world around, governments, even churches, cave in to the spirit of the age.

And so in the face of that, we need to have certainty. How often do we hear messages that question what's true, that question what we know to be true from God's word? In a world of fake news?

In a world of post-truth? We need to know what the gospel message really is so that we can cling on to it. We need to know what promises are going to be fulfilled.

We need to know where the world is heading. When a church says something like, the spirit is leading them in a new direction, that the spirit is leading them away from the historic doctrines of the church, we need to know that that is wrong.

[ 16 : 41 ] We need to have certainty that what Paul taught still stands today. And Paul makes clear that in the face of all the uncertainty of the world, in the face of all the lies that are spread by Satan, we can have that as we cling on to the words of the prophets, as we cling on to the words of Jesus himself, as we cling on to his apostles' words.

We need to know for sure that Jesus is going to return and make all things right. We need to know for certain that this age is not the pinnacle of mankind and humanity.

We need to know that real justice, real peace, real salvation are coming. We need to know that whilst now we might face scorn and ridicule, our future is a glorious and eternal one.

When all around, Christ and his people are pushed to the margins, when you face doubts because you're the only person at work who believes in Jesus, when you start to think that maybe you are wrong, maybe you are closed-minded and unloving, you need to know that what we believe has certainty.

What we believe is heading towards the climax of all of history and will be seen in Jesus' return. You need to know that in the end, we will be vindicated.

[ 18 : 04 ] And because of Scripture, because God has given us His Word, we do have certainty about these things. Third, the third problem the Thessalonians faced was the sabotage of selfishness in chapter 3.

The sabotage of selfishness. The problems faced for this church were suffering from the world, Satan and his lies, and now sin, selfishness.

This church had people who had ceased to work, and so this had the potential to ruin relationships in the church, to steer them off course, to stop them doing what they were meant to be doing. And Paul's main concern about that is about the impact it can have on the whole church.

There are some who seem to think that they don't need to work anymore in chapter 3, probably in the belief that Christ had returned already. They thought there was no point in working because they were now living this wonderful resurrection life.

But Paul calls out the behavior because actually all they were serving to do was drain others. For if they were not working, Paul says, how would they eat?

[ 19 : 21 ] If they were not working, then who's going to be picking up their slack? Would the church need to use its valuable resources to enable these people to eat and survive when they're perfectly able to do it themselves?

And you can see how that could cause problems in a church that is already under pressure. Some working hard to cover for others who are perfectly able. So Paul wants this church not to be split, but to have solidarity in doing good.

Chapter 2, verse 17. The goal of knowing that Christ is going to return, of being sure about the future, Paul wants that to lead them to getting on with every good work.

Did the idle Christians need to listen to Paul and get to work? Yes, absolutely. But how were the other Christians going to interact with them? Were they to help correct them?

Yes. But they were to remember that they're united as brothers and sisters. Paul emphasizes that. These people aren't to be cast out and forgotten about. They are brothers.

[ 20 : 29 ] He uses that warm church family language because Paul wanted this church to be working together in light of the future. Isn't it easy in a church to be so lacking in graciousness about the shortcomings of others?

We look around and think we're doing far more than other people. They're not pulling their weight. We can end up seething inwardly. Of course, we're too polite to mention it.

But we can get very upset that other people aren't doing the work and we're having to do more. For example, maybe you're on a T-ruta. You help with creche. You come and clean the building from time to time and you feel pretty pushed to manage it all.

You know that there's a new Christianity Explored course set to launch soon and Sebastian over there, well, he's been coming for a few years and doesn't really serve anywhere. He says no when asked to help with it and you know that you're next on the list.

You feel under pressure to say yes, you don't want to pass up good gospel opportunities but you just don't know how you're going to manage it all. Well, while Sebastian might need to be given a nudge and told to take his involvement seriously, you are left feeling bitter because you feel you are carrying his slack.

[ 21 : 47 ] all it would take in a church is for a group of people like that to get together and starting to complain and suddenly you have big problems.

We must all work together. So some loving rebuy is important of course, from time to time where brothers and sisters are renegeing on their duty. But we must remember, Paul is saying, that we are brothers and sisters so the goal in it is always restoration, it's always loving improvement because often churches that face big fallouts have a bedrock of what are almost insignificant relational difficulties.

Maybe it's over the creche or the tea and coffee, a selection of people don't pull their weight and things escalate. Paul reminds us that the church are joined together as family and our family business is doing gospel work and harmony together.

It's getting on with every good work and word as Paul says in 2.17. In the face of all these problems, Paul is encouraging security, they have it in God's grace, they have it in the wonderful hope of Christ coming back.

He's encouraging certainty, they have it in the scriptures and he's encouraging a unity in their activity, that in light of the wonderful promises of the gospel, in light of Jesus coming back and all that means, he's encouraging them to be working hard together.

[ 23 : 24 ] What can hold a church faced with these things, faced with all these pressures and struggles together? What can encourage a church like this to keep going? Paul's answer is that it is only the glory of Christ.

Paul's prayer right at the heart of this letter opens up everything for us. Chapter 2, verse 16 and 17. And may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

The key message for the church in Thessalonica and the key message for us is that the promise of seeing the glory of Christ, the prospect of his glorious return is the only hope that we have that will sustain us in serving him.

And with it a church can then get on with its purpose of living that Christ might be glorified. So having the glory of Christ in our minds that we'll share in it one day and then also having in our lives the goal of glorifying Jesus all the more.

The first two chapters of this letter have as their focus Christ's return and glory and how that's going to be great for us and then it flips with how we can live to glorify Jesus.

[ 25 : 01 ] The Thessalonian suffering is made worse by Satan's lies. They're being misled to think that Christ has already returned. The only way, the only way we can keep going in the face of suffering, the only way we can keep going with trying to glorify Jesus with how we live is knowing that when it's difficult, through all the struggles, it will be worth it in the end.

In the end, it will be made right. In the end, justice will be done. If you couple suffering with confusion about Jesus' return, that would be enough to cripple any church.

But if you can keep a church's vision focused on the promise of Christ's glorious return, on the promise of him vindicating his people, on his final victory over Satan, if you can keep a church's vision focused on Jesus being enthroned at the last day, and us sharing in that with him, then that will fuel a church to work together with the purpose of glorifying Jesus.

The prospect of not just all wrongs being made right, but all things being made new, all of us being joined fully forever to Jesus, that is the good hope at the heart of this letter.

That is the comfort that in 2.17 will establish us, will strengthen us, will enable us in every good work and word. The message of this letter is as contemporary as ever.

[ 26 : 42 ] If we are Christians, we have work to do, we will face opposition, there will be people who hate our message, you will have neighbors who think that you are crazy, it may even one day pinch to stand up as one of Christ's, because Satan doesn't want the church to prosper, he doesn't want us to spread the gospel in this city, he wants darkness to rain, he wants misery to be in control, but in this letter Paul wants us to be clear that we share together this wonderful hope in Christ, a future that won't disappoint, one where those who trust Christ will suffer no more, where those who scorn him and his people will face the consequences, one where we'll be raised up together with Jesus, and enjoy all the glory that belongs to him.

Paul wants us to know that we very much still have this hope, but we also have plenty to be getting on with. He has given us Christ and his promise for a glorious future, so that we'll be established in doing his work in this world.

So in the coming weeks, let's get our vision focused on Christ's return, let's get it right, and let's let it establish us, encourage us, comfort us, that we can and will live the Christian life as we trust him. Amen. Father, we do give you great thanks that in the midst of a world that hates you, faced with all sorts of challenges, we know, we can have confidence that it will be worth it because of the Lord Jesus, because there's a future waiting for us, that means anything in this world will peel into insignificance in comparison.

so encourage us today and over the next few weeks before we pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Thank you.