

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 Thanksgiving and Prayer Dundee, 9/1/2011, pm

Background (vs.1-2)

Why 2 Thessalonians?

- Good question!
 - perhaps just to fill in the gaps of what we have looked at together, and of what I have ever preached on!
 - and perhaps because of its teaching on Christ's second coming, which we have maybe neglected over the past 20 years?

Thessalonica

- Paul first came to Thessalonica, which is in Greece, in Acts 17, during his second missionary journey
 - (follows on from what we were looking at last Sunday morning from Acts 16)
 - spoke first in the synagogue for a few weeks; some accepted but many opposed; some **bad characters from the marketplace** were rounded up to form a mob, and Jason was wrongfully imprisoned; Christians sent Paul on his way before more trouble erupted
 - *"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)*
 - Thessalonian Jews come and agitate in Berea too, forcing Paul to move on, but leaving Silas and Timothy behind in Berea to establish the work
 - while Paul was in Thessalonica he received support from the Christians in Philippi, about 100 miles away, and from where he'd recently come - he makes reference to it in **Philippians 4:16**
 - and not long he'd been forced to leave he sent Timothy back to visit the young church (**1 Thessalonians 3:1-6**)
 - on his later journeys, including his journey to Rome, he was at different points accompanied by Christians from Thessalonica (**Acts 20:4, 27:2**)
 - later Demas will desert Paul and end up in Thessalonica (**2 Timothy 4:10**)
- **Thessalonica was capital of the Roman province, well connected and influential**
- From what we can infer from Acts and Paul's letters, the church in Thessalonica seems to have been **basically healthy**
 - no reports of factions within the church
 - no **major** doctrinal errors that Paul feels an urgent need to tackle
 - rather there seems to have been good general progress, **some external pressures and persecution**, but with some apparent **misunderstandings** or lack of a full appreciation of the teaching Paul had given on **Christ's second coming**
 - both 1st and 2nd Thessalonians tackle this issue

Exposition

- All of that is the context in which the greetings of vs.1,2 come:
 - **from Paul, Silas and Timothy** - who have all had **personal** contact with the Thessalonians, know them and care for them
 - to the church **of the Thessalonians** - note how it is the **people**, not the **place**, that is to the fore
 - and the connection is the shared faith **in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**
 - and as his custom was, his greeting prays blessing, God's grace, on those to whom he writes **v.2**

Thanksgiving (vs.3-4)

- When addressing a problem, is our first thought thanksgiving? (**v.3**)
- Notice too what the thanksgiving is for:
 - first, **growth in faith**
 - and second, flowing from that, **love for one another**
- Is this what we look for, are grateful for, see in and strive for in each other?

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- Then third there is a gratitude for perseverance and faith in the midst of trials
 - faith proves its reality in challenge, under pressure...
 - is your faith to the fore only when things are going well...?
 - or will it show up when things are tough too?
- Perhaps its in **external** things, like being at worship - when work or study or family is busy or stressful, do we still strive to make time for God (and more than merely out of duty)?
- Perhaps its in **character** things, like treating others with patience and respect, not losing our tempers, or whatever, at precisely those points when we might be justified in not doing so - because they've let us down, done something stupid...
- Paul saw in the Thessalonians growth in faith, in trust, in dependence on God, particularly in the face of trouble and opposition:
 - and he thanked God for it...
 - even as perhaps we thank God for A&J's faith, trust, dependence on God in the face of their recent loss...
- *Are we growing in those characteristics that Paul gave thanks for?*

Worthy of the kingdom (vs.5-10)

- Paul assesses **faith, love and perseverance** as important - **because of the context of the kingdom**
 - you can be an Olympic class shot-putter, but that won't help you in the 100m! Because what is important is speed...
 - or be a great singer, but that won't help you if you are dancing... when what is important is how you move...
- Faith, love and endurance are important because we are in God's kingdom
 - that is the context in which we are now operating...
 - God rules; he has brought his kingdom into our lives by the Cross, bringing us safe under his rule; and one day the full blossoming of his kingdom will vindicate our faith, when Jesus is revealed from heaven "in blazing fire and with his powerful angels", and bringing judgement on all those who have rejected him... (v.7-8)
 - so **faith** (trust in the Lord), **love** (for our brothers and sisters) and **endurance** (waiting for that which we know to be true to become visible) makes sense!
- In other words, Paul sees them developing a healthy trust in God, and commends them:
 - perhaps going out of his way to do so because there is a hint of self-doubt in the hearts of the Thessalonians?
 - in 1 Thessalonians, as in 2 Thessalonians, Paul is basically encouraged; there he writes to (i) encourage them to live to please God (having been saved), and to (ii) **instruct them about Christ second coming**
 - (perhaps he hadn't had time to make the full implications of Christ's return clear??)
 - the tone in 1 Thessalonians emphasises the imminence of Christ's return - **like a thief** (1 Thess 5:4), possibly because Paul was writing into their (complete?) lack of knowledge...
 - but now, and more of this later in the book, there has perhaps been an **over-correction...**
 - and the Thessalonians are anticipating Christ's return before last Tuesday... and when he hasn't come, are they beginning to question Paul's teaching, and the reality of Christ's return...
 - they are needing encouraged that their present course - suffering and all - is the right one
 - so what they are experiencing in the suffering is **not** evidence they've got things wrong, but rather expected signs of in the **now but not yet** of the kingdom

Application

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- Are we operating from a kingdom perspective?
 - do we know that we are secure in God's kingdom?
 - do we trust that vindication for our faith will come when his kingdom fully comes - so we can wait...
 - do we operate from the confidence that the Lord will come?
 - do we serve now with the urgency of knowing that those who reject Christ now will face his judgement and everlasting destruction?
 - and most of all, do we yearn, do we ache, for the day when he comes and his glory is made manifest?

Prayer (vs.11-12)

- For Paul, all that he has explored thus far shapes his own prayer priorities:
- **First**, he is **constant** in prayer (v.11); **are we?**
- **Second**, he prays that the Thessalonians would be **counted worthy of [God's] calling...**
 - what does that mean?
 - remember that even just **keeping going** as a Christian depends on the continual gracious action of God and the faith of the people...
 - so Paul prays that God will enable his people to demonstrate the reality of their faith in action - making them worthy of their calling
 - **is this what we pray for one another?**
- **Third**, Paul's aim or intention in praying in this way is **God's glory (v.12)**
 - not selfish, but God-centred and God-focused...

Conclusion

- **Are we thankful? (v.3-4)**
 - (and for the right things? For faith and love?)
- **Are we steadfast in the kingdom? (v.5-10)**
- **Are we prayerful? (v.11-12)**
 - (and for the right things? For faith in action? So we might be worthy of his calling??)