

2 Thessalonians 1

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[0:00] Oh, so good to sing of that future hope. And actually ties lovely in with 2 Thessalonians What you hope for shapes what you live for.

This week I was through a discussion group. It was a little bit high-brow for me. We're discussing Plato, Viktor Frankl, Blaise Pascal. I felt an imposter syndrome whilst I was there.

But the extract from the reading from Albert Frankl was he was a Holocaust survivor, eminent psychologist. It's interesting because he speaks about the fundamental idea and place of hope in our lives.

He described very vividly, but not an uncommon occurrence in the concentration camp that he observed. And he describes it this way, and let me quote. He said, The prisoner who had lost faith in the future, his future was doomed.

With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold. He let himself decline and become subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate.

[1:38] We all feared this moment, not for ourselves, which would have been pointless, but for our friends. Usually it began with a prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and washed or go out to the parade grounds.

No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there hardly moving. And in this crisis, this crisis was, if it was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to sick bay or to do anything to help himself.

He simply gave up. And there he remained lying in his own excreta. Nothing bothered him anymore. And Frankl went on to talk about the place of hope.

And he had different ways of describing that hope. He had what he called a psychohygienic, not salvific hope, a temporal hope that would help them get through to the next day if they didn't have an eternal hope.

But if we have not just a temporary hope, but an eternal hope that changes our perspective of the future, then how we anticipate that future will shape how we live today.

[2:42] And Frankl was really kind of struck on the importance of hope in the life of anyone, but in particular, of course, for us as believers. Corrie ten Boom, experiencing similar situations in the concentration camps of the Nazis, wrote about how hope in God and trust in God shaped and transformed even the most bleakest of circumstances.

And you know the stories that she told about how even giving thanks for the fleas that were infesting them, but keeping the Nazi officers out of their building so that they were freed from their interference.

Finding hope even in the most bleakest of circumstances had they put their trust in God as they sought him in prayer, as they sought his presence even there in the most bleakest of circumstances.

See, what we hope for shapes how we live and how we manifest that every day. And we can expect, as we put our hope in the Lord, that he will be helping us as we seek to trust him, as we seek to trust him for every day, as we put our trust in him, who is a firm foundation, a solid rock for our lives.

As we put our trust in Christ. So these are the kind of things that as we look at the book of Thessalonians, God will want to be ministering to our hearts, whether that's in community group or here on Sunday mornings.

[4:14] So in terms of context, well, when we looked at 1 Thessalonians recently, we got a sense of what was happening there, but not everyone was necessarily there for those studies.

But we saw that when we looked at that letter, the apostle Paul was writing into their very immediate circumstances, probably actually, his first kind of recorded letter. And this second Thessalonian letter comes actually, as we'll see, very quickly afterwards. So this is possibly the second recorded letter that Paul ever wrote to the churches. And he's helping them with three things.

He's helping them, first of all, with intense persecution that they're facing. He's going to help them, secondly, with their confusion about doctrine, about teaching. They're receiving some fake letters, which actually have been written in his name with some spurious teaching.

And then thirdly, he's going to help them understand the implications of rejecting true teaching. And we'll see how that works out. And it's interesting that as we look through this, although they are experiencing intense persecution, Paul isn't so much concerned that that persecution is going to destroy the church.

[5:28] Actually, the reverse is happening. It seems to be strengthening them. What his real concern is, and is deeming it a real threat to the church to destroy it, is the false teaching that is permeating around and the rejection of the apostolic teaching.

Those are the things that are going to utterly destroy the church. And you don't need to look terribly far in history to see how that has worked out. So we'll see how Paul helps them with these things in a firm but in a gracious manner.

Today, we're going to hear him speak into their hardships, the persecutions that they're facing. We'll break it into three points. Surprise, surprise. Verses one to two, this gospel-shaped greeting that he gives to them.

Verses three to ten, this gospel-shaped hope that he speaks about and encourages them in the return of Christ. But also, then finally, verse 12, the gospel-shaped prayer that he prays for them. So first of all, the gospel-shaped greeting. We see from the form of writing that Paul's using, he's using a standard form of greeting from that era.

[6:40] And all of his letters, apart from his letter to the Galatians, bear a very similar kind of form, don't they? Talk about who it is from and who it is to and some form of greeting.

So we see who there in verse one is with Paul. It's Paul and Silas, that strong partnership that God had used for them together in the gospel as they seek to proclaim the gospel to a world that had not yet heard it.

And we're delighted to see how just the power of God that they heard about in the Old Testament and that they were witnessing in their lives continue to work powerfully amongst them. But also Timothy there, his kind of son in the Lord as he describes them elsewhere, his kind of mentee at that time.

And see how the greetings that he brings, it's not sort of casual greeting, but there's just a God-centeredness to it, to the church of the Thessalonians in God. He roots their identity firmly in the Lord.

Don't think of yourselves simply as Thessalonians or Scots or whatever. Think about yourselves, you're people who are in God, you're in the Lord. And here he specifically mentions the two persons from the eternal trinity.

[7:50] They are held in God, the perfect heavenly father, whose eternal decree and determination was that they and you and I would be his and that he would be ours.

And in joyful agreement between the father and the eternal father, the eternal son, the eternal son came to purchase us for him through his death on the cross and through his resurrection.

That same two persons from the eternal trinity who from eternity determined these things. That those two, along with the Holy Spirit, that the perfect trinity formed, created time and space and matter, the stars, the galaxies, formed and filled the earth in its entirety, created humanity in his own image, whose same infinite power that created all of these things is at work in them and in you and in I.

Amen. To keep us in him. And it's so easy to forget that, isn't it?

As we get caught up in this stuff of life, we forget what being in God, in Christ means. That he who created the stars and flung them into space is at work in us and through us and around us that we know his love.

[9:19] We are held by him, kept by him. So easy to forget that. Think about the last week. Think about the number of times that just enjoying that would have transformed some of the circumstances that you were facing.

Think about this week. How just being assured in that we sang about his promises and holding to his promises and these truths would change this coming week.

So he talks about the Father, he talks about the Son, and he'll get to the work of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2, verse 13. But for now, he reminds them. You, church of the Thessalonians, yes, you're maybe a small group in a much bigger city, but before the Lord, you're not insignificant.

You are utterly significant to him, and you are held in and by him, in the love of the Father, saved by the power of the Son and his work on the cross for you.

They wonder if as the letter had arrived, the news had gone out that the letter had been there, and as they gathered in whatever place that they were gathering, whether as they settled, and they heard just these first words, you Thessalonians, in Thessalonica, you in God, the Father and the Son, whether that the Holy Spirit was just working in their hearts and it was manna to their souls, living water to their spirits.

[10 : 56] As they settled their hearts, opened them wide to receive what the Lord had to say to them. You know, one of my favorite songs is the old hymn written by John Newton, who also wrote Amazing Grace, which is, How sweet the name of Jesus saints in our believer's ear.

How sweet the name of Jesus saints in our believer's ear. You know, we gather here, and there's lots happening on a Sunday morning and so on, but as we come to his word, let's settle our hearts. Let the sweetness of what is being communicated and we're being reminded of, just minister to our souls and our hearts this morning.

As we're reminded of that we also are in God, loved by the Father, held in the power of this, by the saving power of the Son. You know, as we gather, some of our hearts, as we've come in, will have come in heavy.

Some maybe numb, some distracted, some divided, some a little bit hardened, some soft, some confused, some tender. But as we begin, just let's, even that simple greeting, touch your heart this morning.

[12 : 21] Amen. That this is a letter, not just to them, but to us, to the church of the Sterlingionians. That's us. In, and eternally willed that it would be so.

God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. And what bam, they were intended to be, two troubled souls, those in Thessalonica, and those in Sterling today.

And over every generation, over to whom this has been right. Bam upon bam, as he says, grace and peace.

Grace and peace from God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace, that love, that unmerited, undeserved, unearned love, purchased for us, as the whole of God, came out to rescue the whole of us.

To give us, and purchase for us, amongst the many things, a peace, the shalom, the peace in our mind, in our heart, in our soul, in our emotions, in our bodies.

[13 : 34] Peace from the fact, that we're no longer, at enmity, or at war with God, nor, indeed with ourselves, and others, but that peace, that shalom, permeating, deep, deep into, every, part of our being, such that we become, a people, of peace.

At one time, maybe we did not know, that peace, because of, sin in our lives, and the turmoil, that it was creating, because of, deep insecurities, not appreciating, not knowing, that if we were loved, not knowing, not appreciating, not understanding, our value and worth, because others, had told us, or treated us, as worthless, as we grew up, telling us, that you have to earn love, earn favor, and no matter what we did, it never seemed enough, and you know, that lie, that we were told, as children, still permeates, our thinking, our souls, our hearts, our minds today.

But now, in the deep embrace, of the gospel, in the deep embrace, of God, the Father, as we've received him, then Paul reminds us, we are graced, we are loved, we are valued, we are known, we are heard, we are seen, and to the degree, that we have embraced that, and be the degree, to be receiving, the grace, and peace, that he offers, determine, in your hearts, this week, ask God, that he would help you, understand, the nature, of this grace, and peace, that he has purchased, for you, and your struggles, maybe with, with your identity, with meaning, with value, a sense of being loved, and therefore, concurrent capacities, to love, and show grace, and shalom, and I think key, to some of these, and receiving these things, is surrender, surrendering, to him, you know, we can stir up, such a storm, in our hearts, can't we, of anxiety, frustration, anger, jealousy, bitterness, discontentment, but the one, who can say, in the midst, of the storm, to this storm, still, be quiet, cease, stop, can do the same, work in our souls, and yours, and mine, if we will let him, if we will

surrender, to him, if we will trust him, and his word, and his promises, and the truths, of what he has purchased, for us, surrender, to him, and we get the prayer team, to pray with you, about that, after the service, so there's a gospel, shaped, greeting, that even in these, just very simple words, with massive implications, for each one of us, and those who are hearing it, and then there's here, secondly, we see him turning, to a gospel shaped, hope, in the return of Christ, previously, when he had written,

Paul centered, his encouragement, around faith, hope, and love, we see that, here verse two, we always thank God, for all of you, continually mentioning you, in our prayers, that's chapter one, verse two, in our prayers, we remember, before our God, and our Father, your work, produced by love, your labor, prompted by love, your endurance, inspired by hope, in our Lord, Jesus Christ, faith, hope, and love, we see him using it, elsewhere, maybe four to six years, later, when he wrote, to the Corinthian church, what, first Corinthians 13, 13, now, we know these words, the greatest, these three, remain, faith, hope, and love, and the greatest, is love, and ironically, or interestingly, he's probably writing, to the Thessalonians, during his 18 month stay, to the Corinthian, in Corinth, as I mentioned earlier, as we can see here, in verse four, they are enduring, persecutions, and trials, but these are not, the things, that are threatening, to destroy the church, verse three, we ought always, to thank God, for you brothers, and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith, is growing more, and more, even despite, all the hardships, you're facing, and the love, all of you have, for one another, is increasing, and you're my closest, and you know, when Kristen was praying, about these things, these verses, she's saying, we don't experience it, my closest encounter, with this kind of dynamic, is from our, last couple of trips, to Southeast Asia, arrests, imprisonments, interrogations, intimidations, by local militia groups, or council officials, or the police, or even just government policy, families, beating and shunning, new converts, attack, if you share your faith, or not participate, in the family religion, church buildings, pastors' homes, bulldozed, murders, happening amongst, the people of God, in that place, you know, for the international team, that's going out, next week, you know, still in the memory, are two years ago, when one of the meetings, in one of the cities, was broken up, by one of these local, religious militia, and the team member, had to flee, and then had to do the teaching, that he was going to do that week, from the safe distance, from a hotel, and do it online, it's one of the reasons, why the team, when they go out, instruction is, take one small bag with you, as you go out to that place, just so that you're ready, for a quick, quick exit, moment, but what do you experience, when you are amongst, those who are facing, these kind of things, day in, day out, what you see, and what you witness, is a humble people, committed, to the Lord, whose faith, and trust in the Lord, if I could bottle it up, and take it back with us, we would do well, to drink from, because it's just, 100% Jesus, they trust, they live, because they, and they're able to do this, because their hope, is not just for this life, their hope, is firmly centered in Christ, and what is purchased, now, and to come, and it gives them, the ability, in the midst of the storm, to live calmly, joyously, fervently, and lovingly, and it's interesting, that what Paul goes on to do, about the evidence, of this maturing faith, it is a corresponding, verse three, increasing love, for one another, a closer, walk with God, grasping, the implications, of the gospel, for their lives, the height, the depth, the length, of the love of God, their heavenly father, for them, is increasing, their capacity, of love for him, and for one another,

Jesus, says as well, by all this, by this all men, will know, that you are my disciples, how, that you have love, one for the other, John 13, 35, people will know, that you've been, hanging around with him, spending time, with him, learning from him, because of the way, you, love one another, because of the way, that we love one another, and, you know, because of the way, that we're called, and the spirit working, to increase our lives, it will eat us up inside, if that love, is being impaired, in some way, the spirit will be moving us, and our consciences, to repair, and, I think he's giving thanks, for these things, because he knows, he's been praying, for these things, and how do we know, he's been praying, for these things, because he mentions it, first Thessalonians, specifically, chapter one, verses two and three, faith, love and endurance, inspired by hope, and these are the things, that he's been praying for, and that hope, inspired endurance, or perseverance, he goes on to talk about, and comment on in verse four, therefore, among God's churches, we boast about your perseverance, and faith, in all the persecutions, and trials you're enduring,

[22:31] Paul links, the ability to persevere, and hope, specifically in Romans, chapter five, he says, suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope, it reminds us, that nothing, no situation, is wasted in God's economy, you might think, what is the point of this,

why are these things happening, well suffering, perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope, what are the circumstances, that we might be, experiencing personally, at the moment, which means, you're reminded of these things, and begin to bring that hope, to bear in our situations, and verses five to seven, have a more solemn aspect, to them don't they, they start as one commentator, calls it with the bright side, of God's judgment, or just a righteous judgment, and in choosing, and in saving them, verse five, all this is evidence, that God's judgment, or his ways, are right, and as a result, that you will be counted, worthy of the kingdom, or fitted or suited, for the kingdom, for which you are suffering, that whilst the world, is under a present, and coming judgment,

God is concurrently, working, in and refining, his people, you and I, not pressuring, or beyond that, which we can bear, but just the right amount, of heat, so that theirs, and yours, and mine, our faith, as Peter reminds us, though refined by fire, is proved genuine, and as it is refined, in that fire, and through that fire, they are being changed, they are being renewed, in hope, and in trust, in the Lord, they're finding new aspects, of his character, new avenues, of his promises, and how they work out, in their lives, have you been wondering, lately, why all this happening to me, well part of it, is refining, he wants to meet you, in that moment, he wants to reveal, new aspects of his character, new depth, in which you can, he is trustworthy, and faithful, but also, to help grow, your faith, and mine, but as the spirit, is at work, in our hearts, what is he producing, well a greater desire, for more, in a sense of heaven, now, it's only ever, going to be a fraction, of what it will be, but his spirit, is working in us, wooing us, drawing us closer, to a greater sense, of his presence, a greater understanding, of who we are now, in him, and who we will be, then, a greater ability, to hold on to him, and his precious promises, and apply them, and receive them, and enjoy them, in our lives, continually asking, how does the gospel, reshape my attitudes, in this situation, my reactions, and my actions, you know, it's noticeable, when folks, who come from an area, with a strong, regional accent, have gone back home, living away, have gone back home, for holidays, or been on a long call, with somebody from back home, with that strong accent, they come back into the room, and you think, oh, yep, you've been back home, you've been speaking, to such and such, it's true, for us as well, that when we've been, calling back home, when we've been, spending time with Jesus, hopefully people can tell, because we are changed, how much time, are we spending, on the phone, back home, we're missing out, on so much, you know, you don't need words, always, sometimes you just need, to sit and be still, enjoy his presence, listen, and then there is, this darker side, to the judgment, and here,

Paul illustrates, and talks about, the fate of all those, who persecute God's children, and I say these things, with no glee, it is verse nine, everlasting destruction, they persist in it, verse six, God is just, he will pay back, trouble for trouble, to those who trouble you, and give relief to you, who are in trouble, and to us as well, this will happen, when the Lord Jesus, is revealed from heaven, and blazing fire, with his powerful angels, he will punish those, who do not know God, and do not obey, the gospel of our Lord Jesus, they will be punished, with everlasting destruction, and shut out, from the presence, literally from his face, the face of the Lord, and from the glory, of his might, on the day he comes, to be glorified, in his holy people, and to be marveled at, among all those, who have believed, and this includes you, because you believed, our testimony to you, on the day when he comes, on the day when Christ comes, and he is coming, no one, no one will escape, the just judgment of God,

Paul's telling us, doesn't matter how much power, we have, how much money we have, to be able to get, the best of lawyers, to try and get out, on a technicality, there will be no ability, for false witness, and even if no one else, has witnessed, what God has done, the God who, what we have done, the God who is fully present, in all circumstances, at all times, all knowing, all seeing, cannot have the wool, pulled over his eyes, his judgment, on the day that it comes, will be utterly truthful, utterly fair, and utterly final, and the Bible is really clear, that all of us, are destined, for eternal destruction, where we will be removed, from the face, from the sight of the Lord, like when the Father, turned his face, away from the sun, on the cross, and the great darkness, came on the land, so as he turns his face, away at the day, of the just judgment, casting, those who have not, trusted in Christ, into everlasting darkness, destruction, and hell's torment, now there's a reason, today, if you've been seeking, and aren't yet believing, to put your trust, in Jesus Christ, and his saving power, because that alone, is the thing that will, will see us, to heaven, and escape these things, but also, these things, are a reason, are they not, to have a heart, for those who don't yet know him,

that they too, might escape, what is coming, and may know the hope, that changes, not just for now, but for eternity, to go out, into our campuses, to go out, into the streets, to go out, into the prisons, to go out, amongst the youth, and amongst the students, amongst our neighbours, and amongst our colleagues, amongst our family members, and out into the worlds, and proclaim to all, who will come, and who will hear,

Jesus Christ saves, come, come receive the salvation, that he offers, but for us, for those who are his, there's always, a tinge of sadness, now, for those who, we know, who we love, are not yet believing, but for us, there is a different, future ahead, verse 10, on the day he comes, to be glorified, in his holy people, and to be marvelled at, among all those, who have believed, that includes you, Thessalonians, that includes you, Sterlingtonians, because you believed, this is our testimony, that you believe, the apostolic gospel, on that day, when we are finally, and fully changed, when we rise, into the air, when we see him, face to face, it will be, as yet, unimaginable, on that day, but we know, and we're told here, it will, be, glorious, as we behold, as we marvel, at him, in all his splendor, and in all his glory, that which we have longed to see, finally we will see, and we will do so, probably wide eyed, with a huge, gasp of wonder, open mouth, and yet grinning, from ear to ear, praise welling, in our souls, as we maybe, join in always for us, the most beautiful song, we have ever sung, with the most beautiful harmonies, in all the ranges, and ranges we have not ever heard, and suddenly we are able, to join in with them, things we were never able, to sing before, we can sing now, and on that day, everything that we have put our hope in, for today, comes into fruition, as we enter into, perfect love, and joy, and trust, all these fully, fully fulfilled, and perfected, forevermore,

[32:47] Paul reminds us, how we receive all this, at the end of verse 14, 10, as I said earlier, by no other means, you don't have to, you know, earn it, and do all these great, acts of heroism, or whatever, there's only one thing, that is required, God has made it, really easy, simply to believe, in the testimony, of the apostles, the apostolic gospel, to repent, and trust in Jesus, as Savior, and Lord, over our lives, to do that, 180 degree, change in direction, away from God, to God, and put our faith, in the saving power of Jesus, but stop, and rest in, just that moment, that is to come, that future hope, that we're looking forward to, that Paul articulates, in verse 10, that is coming, friends, that day is coming, it is the day, we long for, and what we hope for, and what we put our hope in, changes how we live, doesn't it, changes how we live now, that we don't put our hope, and our store, in the things of today, but in him, and what he has purchased, for us, let that future hope, shape us, what we're living for, now, shaping how we live now, how we love now, our ability to persevere, walk humbly, gratefully, helped, held by the one, who has loved us, since before time began, these are the things, that Paul wants to speak into, encourage, these, persecuted believers, but us also this morning, with this gospel shaped hope, in the return of Christ, but also briefly, in this gospel shaped prayer, verse 11, with this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy, suited to of his calling, and that is by his power, he may bring to fruition, your every desire for goodness, and your every deed prompted by faith, we pray this, so that the name of our Lord Jesus, may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our Lord, of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, so interesting, and again,

Kristen kind of pointed to this, to look at how the apostles prayed, and what they prayed for, and actually interestingly, it's going to reflect, what Christ is praying, and interceding for us, at the right hand of the Father, and it is these things, that they, and that we may be, made worthy of the calling, as children of God, and that is what we are, and Paul expresses that, in so many different ways, doesn't he, Philippians 3, 12, I press on to take hold of that, for which Christ Jesus, already taken hold of me, 1 Thessalonians 5, 23, may God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through, may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, it's a prayer for our whole being, to be wide open, to God's purposes, to be worked out in us, purposes that permeate, every aspect of our being, our character, how we act, how we react, what do we give our mind, to considering, pondering on, thinking about, what we desire, desire for goodness, that is these things, outworked in the, what he describes in Romans 1, as the obedience of faith, or deeds prompted by faith, it's a reason we go out, isn't it, into all the ministries, that we're involved in, mentioned earlier, but also, why we get involved in setup, on our Sunday morning, the AV, and minister amongst the kids and youth, hosting, leading home group, pastorally caring, discipling, sharing, doing these hidden and unsung, selfless acts, that we do, that only the Lord knows, in our workplaces, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, amongst our family, as we

generously seek, to use our gifts, our finances, and our time, because he is at work, in us, setting us free, to enjoy his purposes, transforming our characters, transforming our loves, reordering our fears, centered, all on the hope, that we have, and the Spirit's working, as we see here, is bringing together, two desires, ours, and his, to the point where, our souls, begin to settle, and are able to say, not my will, but yours be done, today, and tomorrow, and the day after, to be able to acknowledge, as Isaiah tells us, that his ways, are not our ways, his ways are much higher, than ours, so we're able to say, you know,

I don't necessarily, know and understand, what's going on, but I trust you, and I surrender, in the midst of it, I put my trust, and my certain hope, in you, and for today, and for this season, and for my life, because I know that, one day I will be with you, and all this will seem, as nothing, and therein we find, the shalom, the peace that passes, understanding, therein is the beginnings, of that unshakable joy, that is able to transcend, the circumstances of life, that Peter calls, in verse Peter one, an inexpressible, and glorious joy, so just as we finish, I want, I'm going to ask the band, to come up, and as we surrender, to him, as we put our trust, in him, what does Paul tells us, happens, what's glory, verse 12, we pray, so that the name, of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be glorified, in you, and you in him, according to the grace, of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, he is most glorified, in us, when we are most satisfied, in him, see what we hope for, shapes, how we live, and what we live for, so in a moment of silence,

I'm going to ask the band, to play for us, just maybe one of the songs, just quietly, that we sung earlier, and as we, as they do that, just ask you to come afresh, and maybe surrender afresh, lay down those fears, that pride, those pretensions, that sin, that stubbornness, that independent spirit, that huge intellectual, and physical capacities, that endless ingenuity, all that giftedness, that you have, and lay all, the good and the bad, lay all at his feet, and say, Lord, help me only, to pick up, what you want me, to pick back up, and use it, how you want me, to use it, for my hope, and my trust, is in you, for this life, and for the next, Amen.