

When Storms Hit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 July 2021

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're going to look back for a few minutes this morning at Thessalonians, if you've got it in your Bibles in front of you, then it's great.

If not, maybe you can put it up on the screens for some of the time, because we're kind of looking at the passages anyway. So it's 1 Thessalonians 2 from verse 17 through to chapter 3.

Oh, you can't actually put it on the screen. Well, you can, but we'll get rid of my face, which is a good thing. Anyway, yeah, see it's there as well. So just to go back to what we have looked at, so if I remember, this is a church, a new church in Thessalonica, and it was set up by three church planters, Paul, the Apostle Paul Timothy and Sylvainus or Silas, and they went and preached the gospel there, and there was a small church, it was formed, people from all kinds of different backgrounds.

But there was also quite a lot of opposition, and the opposition really drove Paul, the three church planters out of Thessalonica, they couldn't stay anymore. So Paul wrote this letter, as we'll see, he was desperate to find out how they were getting on, and so he wrote this letter because he'd sent Timothy back, and Timothy had come with a good report.

We're not going to look at the good report today, that's for next week. So there'll be a bit of anticipation for next week to hear what Timothy said. But Paul wrote this letter in response to Timothy's report, and as part of God's living word, because remember we saw that in chapter one, that it's not just the word of Paul, it's the living word of God.

[1 : 4 2] So it remains absolutely relevant and vital for our lives, so God's breathed it and God's given it, so it's not just for Thessalonica, it's not just a kind of important piece of history, which it is, but it's a living word, God is breathed into it, so it still speaks to us in our lives today.

And we've been looking very much at the foundations, the apostolic foundations of the church, that the church is founded on Jesus and the apostles, their teaching and the prophets, the teaching of the Old Testament, basically telling us that the Bible is the foundation, and Jesus as the Bible, as it were, in the flesh, Jesus, the person of Jesus, that's the foundation of our faith as Christians.

Still is, nothing changes, and that's why it's so important for us. So many of you will have read over the last few days, and some of you may, because of your connections with the States, many of you may have closer connections with the tragic building collapse in Miami, and that was in the press here quite a lot, and rightly so.

It was hugely tragic that people in an ordinary, what we would call a set of flat, set of apartments, went to their beds at night and they died.

They didn't see the morning because the building catastrophically collapsed. And as with all these things, once the immediate urgency of the situation has gone, and questions are asked, and of course it seems to have been the case that the foundations were never right in that building.

[3 : 3 0] And that is ultimately what caused it, and that was brought to people's attention, but people didn't act on it at the time, never thinking of course that anything as brutal as what happened did.

But that reality that's been in our newspapers and our social media over the last number of weeks is a really strong illustration of the importance of good foundations in building work, obviously.

But that's the same picture that Jesus has used, particularly in Ephesians 2, where he speaks about our faith being founded on the apostles and the prophets, and also the Lord Jesus Christ as the foundation stone.

And that remains really significant for us, that we recognize that the apostles are unique because they were witnesses, eyewitnesses of Jesus.

They received teaching from Jesus, and Paul as one untimely born was the one who was ushered into the presence of Jesus and received the teaching of Jesus for the church, with Jesus as the foundation of truth in the flesh.

[4 : 42] And that remains our foundation, it's really important that we remember that because it heightens the significance of knowing and understanding Jesus as He's revealed in the Word and the teaching that we follow because we've been transformed in our hearts.

And so the question we ask today is how, again, is how do we live? How do we live our lives? In whom is it that we put our trust? Who do we imitate? Because Paul speaks a lot about imitating Him as He imitated Christ.

What is, if you took a moment just to think about your own life, what is the foundation of your life? And I know if you're Christians here, you'll say, well, of course Jesus is the foundation of my life.

And that's great. But what does that mean, and what does that look like, and how do we model that? And if you're not a Christian, then that is an important question as well, because we all found, we all base our lives on certain things, on certain truths, on certain ways of thinking.

And God is saying that how we've, the foundation of our life impacts the whole building of our life as long as we live for all of its existence.

[5 : 50] So you know, for me as a preacher, the most important thing for me and for the congregation is that we have the foundations right. And that's kind of a lifelong experience as well, which sounds a bit paradoxical, I know.

But as the family of God, we're always wanting to assure ourselves that our foundations are in the right place. We're thinking in the right way. We're trusting in the right person.

We're imitating our Savior, Jesus Christ, and that's how we live our lives. And within that, there's that huge principle that we've mentioned before last couple of weeks.

With Christ as the cornerstone of our lives as Christians, as those who follow Jesus, we recognize that He is the truth.

But He is the truth become flesh. He's the truth in a body. He's the truth in a person. It's not just an academic ascent in our brains to things.

[6 : 50] We recognize Jesus who walked on the earth and who exemplified divine love for us. Love is not a theoretical concept.

It is made clear in the person of Jesus Christ who came, who lived, who died on our behalf, who rose again on the third day to eternally restore a relationship to Him as we put our trust in Him because we were lost and separated.

And so as that same truth is one that we, is the foundation of our lives as Christians. It's not just that, oh, I'm a Christian because I believe A, B and C.

I read it in the Bible here, or I ascent to this truth. Being a Christian is saying, I live A, B and C. I, I example of what it is to imitate Jesus Christ.

The truth that you hear today, and you know, I think sometimes it's still very cerebral the way we do it, the way that I speak and you listen. But I think we can still be very active in that through the Spirit of God and be taking it and applying it into our own lives.

[8 : 03] What I don't see is you as Christians, you're taking that word that you hear and that is in your brain from the Bible, and you're soaking it down into your body and it's moving into your hands and into your feet and into your eyes and into your mouth so that it transforms who we are.

We are incarnating ourselves. We're making flesh the truth. That's the foundation of our Christian lives. And that's the foundation of our church, is that we live the truth.

We live the truth not just loving Jesus but loving one another. You know the worst thing in the world possibly is an orthodox but cold church that believes intellectual truth about Jesus, doctrine, but never takes that doctrine and allows it to break their heart and have their heart remolded because that's what the gospel does and that's what the gospel is, the code of our faith.

It's never a lifeless dogma or a disembodied doctrine. It is the word living in us, divine love transforming us and changing us and we let him breathe into our lives.

That's why it's been so good to sing because it's an expression. And it just reminds me of how inadequate it's been to sit and watch it and how good it is that we...

[9 : 28] And even as we worship that you're listening and you're drawing the truth from me because you've prayed and you've asked God to speak to you today, the living word from His truth, the Bible.

So what's the truth particularly that I want to share with you from this passage today? This is a very important foundational truth and you'll not be happy that I'm going to share this one today, but it is that following Jesus is a hard road.

That's a foundational truth. It was for Paul. It obviously was for Jesus who is our Savior and Lord and we follow and recognize that to a degree we imitate Him.

It's the best life, isn't it? It's the right road to walk on, but it's not easy. We are healed by Jesus Christ, but we are still being healed.

It's a spiritual war zone where the victory is assured because of what Jesus has done, but we're still called to fight because Christ has come to dwell in bodies that still have sinning in them.

[10 : 37] We're still in recovery as it were, and we live in a broken world with fractured relationships. We see that in the church, don't we? Fractured relationships. See in our family, difficult, sometimes in our marriage, sometimes in just in our work, there's fractured relationships and it's hard to follow Christ in that relationship.

And what we often do is we find it really easy then to just accuse God and question Him, question His goodness, question that He doesn't care for me. Well, we have God loves me. Surely it would be like a really great life now if I'm following Him and serving Him.

Isn't that what blessing means? Is He not going to give me a kind of sense of heaven today? Life, if I'm following Jesus, shouldn't it be easy? Can I not be happy if I'm following Jesus at least my standard pain-free, full of my kind of pleasures because the living God has come to dwell in me?

But we need to remember that this life and the way we live today is not how it's meant to be and it's not how it's going to be in the future. It's temporary.

And remember in this life, now this is very important, when has true love, when has true love ever run smooth? When has true love ever been easy?

[11 : 55] You know that, don't you? And I know that, that when we love, it's costly and it's sacrificial. It never runs smooth.

In this life, in our relationships, you know, we find that, don't we? How much more then, when we are loved with a perfect love, a divine love, how much more is that love and the cost of that love going to make life difficult for us because of our own imperfections?

If your Christianity today, if you've come to church and your Christianity up to now has been really easy, if it's been a walk in the park, then I would have to ask the question of you, have you allowed the gospel to sink into your heart?

Because if the gospel is sunk into our hearts, then that's going to be costly because true love always is costly.

And we're faced with recognizing this Christ who, in the light of the cross and his commitment to us, how can we doubt the depth of his love?

[13 : 07] How can we doubt his good purposes for us? So I'm going to mention a couple of things. Well, actually, three things.

Now, I try not to do three things because you all think that sermons are always three points. But I can't help it. It's just the three things that come out of this short passage. Three things that make life hard for a Christian.

First is anxiety. The second is spiritual attack. And the third is persecution. I'm going to look at these briefly. The first is anxiety. Look at Paul here in chapter 17 and verse 3.

For since we were torn away from you brothers in a short time and not in person, we endeavored all the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face. And then in verse 1 of chapter 3, therefore, when we couldn't bear it any longer, we were willing to be left behind.

And then verse 5 he says, I couldn't bear it any longer. So I sent to find out about your faith. And the whole tone of that passage, which I try to get across when we were reading, was that Paul is really kind of anxious about the fact that he's had to leave this young church behind.

[14 : 16] And he can't do anything for them. And he longs to be with them. He's unhappy about that and he's frustrated. And it's eating away at him. It's kind of gnawing away at him. He couldn't bear it any longer.

He's worrying about this young church, worrying that he can't be there to teach them and to protect them and help them. And he's anxious. I think that comes across. He's really anxious. He's an apostle.

He's an apostle anxious, surely not. But it's perfectly natural, isn't it? When he became an apostle, he didn't cease to be human.

He didn't stop being anxious in his life. He recognized because he cared that anxieties would come. And he recognized that he was in a battle and that there was things he couldn't control and there were circumstances that fed his anxiety.

And he was surely, presumably he was praying really good prayers. You know, he was praying, let me go back to that people that the church that I planted that you saved. I mean, it wasn't like he was selfish, but he was anxious.

[15 : 20] And isn't that the same for us in our lives that there's so much anxiety in our lives? Because we're out of control of circumstances, unwanted circumstances, frustrations that our plans don't work out as we want them to do, even good plans, even spiritual plans that we've committed to God in prayer.

And we think our prayers aren't getting answered. What's God playing at? My prayers aren't getting answered. We care about other people and we see them being hurt or we see them struggling and we're praying that they will be released and things will be easier.

But we're anxious because nothing is happening the way we want that to do, want it to happen. And anxiety makes the Christian life difficult.

But what's happening, I think what's happening here is that Paul is, as he goes through this, he's learning dependence and you'll see more about that next week. Because in answer to this cry that he makes both to the church and to God, Timothy brought good news, but I'm not going to speak about that today.

But he was learning through this because he was an apostle, but he was still a learner. He was learning dependence on God. God was saying to him through this, Paul, it's okay.

[16 : 32] They're my people. I'll look after them when you can't. And he was learning to rely on others. Ah, Paul, you're going to have to send Timothy. You can't go yourself.

You're going to have to send someone else and rely on someone else. He had to learn delegation and he had to learn the great truth which he then articulated in Philippians 4-6, do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving.

Make your requests known to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. He was learning that, that he could be anxious but take that anxiety to God in prayer.

Wasn't always about Paul. He had to learn about the reality of God and the reality of other people with gifts doing the work that he couldn't do. Now that is a great lesson for us in terms of the battle of the Christian life.

I'm sure many of you are faced, as many of us have been faced with anxious thoughts over these last months, years and months and the difficulties and the challenges, whatever they might be.

[17 : 42] And yet there's a battle in that that we are to take our anxiety to the living God and depend on Him and learn of Him and seek to know Him better and recognize that there is a battle within that.

And maybe today, for example, not only are you having to learn to lean on God, maybe within the church, God's saying to you, I want you to be a timothy.

I want you to be someone who goes out to help and support and look after others. I want you to be an encourager, to ease other people's anxiety, to help the Paul who sent you and to help the church that you're going to and recognize that we are here for one another and that sometimes our anxiety is eased when we lean on someone else, when we can't do what we think we're being asked to do.

Lean on God and lean on one another. That's the foundational model of the kind of church we want to be and continue to be and look to be.

So the first thing is anxiety. The second thing is spiritual attack. In chapter 2 verse 18, Paul says, as he's speaking to them, sorry, yep, verse 18, because I wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us.

[19 : 09] And then in chapter 3 and verse 5, he says, for this reason I could bear it no longer, I sent to you, learn about your faith for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you out and our labor would have been in vain.

So don't you believe in a personal devil? Paul does here, he speaks about it. Is your world only naturalistic, materialistic? Do you think about the devil in mythical terms?

Yeah, that's for, you know, unsophisticated thinkers, unscientific thinkers. If you're a Christian and think like that, then that's a serious problem.

I don't doubt there's lots of people who are not Christians who don't believe in God or the devil, needless to say. But if you're a Christian and don't realize the depth of spiritual opposition and the personal reality of a devil, then you know what the thing is, you're making Jesus out to be a liar, because Jesus absolutely believed in a personal Satan and devil.

And you're doing the exact opposite of what Jesus is who is truth incarnate, and Satan is the author of lies.

[20 : 25] And we're attributing, as some of the religious leaders in Jesus' day did, the attributed satanic and dark work to Jesus, clearly the complete opposite of who He was and what He was.

And Satan, as Paul speaks of here, the Bible makes clear is a fallen angelic being who set himself against God and his death and sin personified.

He was defeated by Jesus on the cross where Jesus took the wrath of God and defeated the power of the grave and of sin and of guilt for all who put their trust in Him, but He is yet to be destroyed, He will be.

He's defeated but not destroyed. Exists to tempt and to deceive and create havoc in the life of every believer. Now Paul accepted Him as real.

Absolute matter of fact, Paul speaks here, and he says that Satan stopped him going back to the people of Thessalonica. Now, we don't have any details about that. We don't know how that transpired or the circumstances.

[21 : 34] But it was clear enough to Paul that it was a malevolent force that kept him from going back to these people. He was spiritually sensitive enough. And he knew that the same Satan was tempting the early church in Thessalonica to give up their faith.

That was what he was worried about. He was worried because they were going through hard times that they would just be tempted to give up. Oh, what have we become believers for? This is a nightmare. We're being persecuted.

There's never going to be anything. And he thought they might give up because they were tempted to do. And that becomes our temptation as well. He wants to tempt us to give up being Christians, following Jesus.

Life's rubbish. It's difficult. He isn't good. I'm better on my own. And sometimes when you go on your own, things are easy. And so you think, okay, it must be right to go on my own.

You feed. You can feed that sense of injustice and we just want to have fun. And, you know, we're only young once. So we drift from Jesus.

[22 : 39] But the foundational truth that Paul wants to get across here is that we are in a battle. Ephesians 6.12 speaks about the battle that we're in, that we need protection. And can I say if you're a new Christian, particularly if you're a new Christian, don't be surprised if life seems to go belly up for a while.

Because that often happens, isn't it? There may be sometimes a little bit of a honeymoon period, but then sometimes things seem to go very badly. And you say, well, what's going on here? My life was never like that before.

And if you're a Christian and life has gone belly up and you're tempted to stop praying or stop following Jesus or stop depending on Him, because you're finding that life is much easier and Jesus becomes that nagging conscience in your head, I think that's just, it's too simplistic, isn't it?

Because that's exactly what the devil wants us to do. He's suckered us into it. Without blinking, He's suckered us into thinking that God somehow doesn't exist. Second Corinthians 11.14 speaks of Him as an angel of light.

You know, masquerading as an angel of light. And that's because He was one. And don't you see He knows the truth much better than we know it? He knows the Bible much better.

[23 : 53] He knows Jesus and God much better than we do. And so He knows how to trip us up. And we need to be aware and protected and guarded and covered in God's love and protected by Jesus.

So in St. Columba's, the times were together in worship, the preaching, the sacrament that we'll enjoy tonight, the Lord's Supper, the prayer times. If we choose to drift from them and not prioritize them and maybe leave them to others, inevitably we'll struggle.

Inevitably our hearts will go cold. And then we'll want to give up because we're keeping ourselves from the very source of help and hope that enables us to be protected and overcome.

The means of grace, the Bible, we traditionally sometimes call church, the Bible and prayer, the means of grace. That's a good word because it helps us, it teaches us, and we are to do it together.

You know what war is like? Well, we don't really, many of us. But in a war, you need allies. In the trenches, you need companions. A predator always singles out people who are on their own.

[25 : 05] And Satan's no different. So we have this battle that we're in with spiritual attack, and if we keep ourselves from the body of Christ and from Christ Himself, who is our love and our hope, we will open ourselves to danger.

Last thing, and very briefly, he speaks about spiritual attack, and he also speaks about persecution. And that's really the reason he wrote the letter because this young fledgling church was beaten up and persecuted basically by everyone around them.

They were facing afflictions. We were told that in verse 3 and verse 4 of chapter 3. And that word just, it can be variously translated, trials or persecutions or afflictions.

And it's the same word. Remember that story in the New Testament where Jesus, women with an issue of blood, touched Jesus, but he was being pressed by a whole big crowd.

And so, you know, he said, who touched me? And the whole laugh, he said, what do you mean who touched you? There's a massive crowd here and all pressing in on you. And you're asking that question? Well, it's the same word that's used here of affliction.

[26 : 13] It's being pressed in and being oppressed as it were. Sort of opposition from outside, a crushing, a feeling of being crushed.

And for the Thessalonian church, it was, you know, people from outside, the authorities and the mob and the jealous, devious people in the Sanhedrin and the unjust accusations being made against them.

They became the focus for many of opposition and mockery and circumstances seemed to militia against them so that even their founding members, Paul and Timothy and Silas, were taken away from them.

Now you may be coming to church today just feeling crushed. Being pressed in, difficult. You know, whether it's issues and troubles with family or you feel you're being singled out as a Christian and you can't take it anymore, you're living out your life and there's just this whole struggle of being opposed in the workplace, maybe, sometimes in your neighborhood.

But he reminds us that that is always going to happen. It's the pressure of not conforming, compromising, having a different ethic, a different standard, a different truth, a different value, a different love, whether it's sexually, morally, philosophically, spiritually, wherever we are, we find that we're going to be opposed.

[27 : 52] And yet, and next week, you'll see that God strengthens and helps and protects and shows them something that enables them to keep going.

And so we need to remember that it is a difficult road we're on as Christians. We remember who we are and we need to remember our foundations.

And I just finished by reading these verses, what Paul says in 19 and 20, I, Paul, verse 19, for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus that is coming, is it not you?

For you are our glory and our joy. And we need to remember that as Christians, that we are part of something much greater, something that will be significant when Jesus comes back, that we will be called to be with Him, and we are to do that together.

And it's to be, it's a glorious and a joyful walk that we are on together, and that Jesus is our Lord and Savior and our friend.

[29 : 01] It's a great message. It's a great truth that we have as Christians. And we need to remember the foundations which are both realistic and also visionary for us.

We have great reason for hope and for joy because we are Jesus' fruit, and Jesus will come and take us home. We are asked to rely on Him and know the foundation of our life.

If Jesus and the truth of God is not the foundation of your life, then when the storms come in life, you may stagger on, but you will never stagger on successfully and with life beyond death.

Death is that the edifice of your life will come crashing down, and it's an unspeakable separation from Jesus, from life, and from love, who pours out His grace to you even when you don't recognize it.

He comes with open arms, and He says, look, I'm the way, I'm the truth, and I'm the life. No one comes to the Father but by me, but His arms are open, and He promises to be with us and promises to take us through the difficulties as well.

[30 : 21] It's a great message to Thessalonians. It's so realistic, it's so honest, and yet it's so hopeful because it tells us where our power and where our truth and where our love lies.

And remember that true love never runs smooth, but in Him it will always run and keep going. Amen. Let's pray.

Father God, help us to know You and love You and serve You. Help us to be honest and know that the Word of God is honest to us, but is also full of hope and full of joy. We'll go on to see in the next number of weeks as well.

I pray that Your Word would encourage and challenge and comfort us as well as we remember who You are and that You speak to us today.

We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.