

Stand Firm (Isaiah 11:1-5 & 2 Thes 2:1-17)

11-Aug-19

Please keep your Bibles open to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

There's the usual outline to take notes, if you wish

Let's pray first.

Intro

The Scouts have a motto?

Be prepared

Some people take being prepared too far...

[PowerPoint 1-2-Funny Slides]

Seriously, though, Nelson Mandela said this:

One cannot be prepared for something, while secretly believing it will not happen

[PowerPoint 3-Nelson]

That's what Apostle Paul was saying in his first letter to the Thessalonians -
Jesus is coming back - *be prepared*

But we have to understand how to wait for the end - when in one sense the end has already begun

[PowerPoint 4-How do we wait for the end?]

How do we wait for the end? Here's some *wrong* ways...

- Prosperity Gospel - says King Jesus is already reigning - you are a child of the King - so claim all your inheritance now - health, wealth and prosperity

- Some say - the whole world is going to rack and ruin - nothing is going to be okay until Jesus returns - until then it's all doom and gloom
- Some Christians - don't like the idea of the end - and don't want to talk about it - they ignore it - they say Christianity is about living today - and don't bother me with this stuff - it will all pan out in the end
- Others - are so convinced Jesus is coming back now - they say the signs are everywhere - there's no point in planning for future

So, how do we wait for the end?

There are 4 priorities

The Last 3 are in this passage

The first priority is what we learnt from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians

So, our 1st point is - **Be prepared for Jesus - at ANYTIME**

[PowerPoint 5a-Anytime]

Be Prepared for Jesus - at ANYTIME (1 Thes)

See 1st Thessalonians 5:1-2

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come ***like a thief in the night***

It's not that Jesus' return is sneaky or He comes back to rob people - the point is that it is **unexpected** - if you knew when Jesus was coming back you would be ready - but He's coming will be as unexpected as a thief.

So - be prepared *for Jesus to return at ANYTIME*

So, if Jesus is coming back - we're not just living for this world - there's a better place - called Heaven - to look forward to

We long for Christ's return and that changes everything - and we can't claim anything in this world as the end - in and of itself - it should remind us of what Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount

[PowerPoint 5b-Matt 6]

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matt 6:19-20)

Jesus is saying be ready for Heaven - by investing in Heavenly things - that last forever. Be ready for Jesus at ANYTIME

And we shouldn't let people tell us Jesus isn't coming back - or listen to people asking, where is He? The same comments were made in the Apostle Peter's time
See 2 Peter 3:18-19

[PowerPoint 6-thousand years]

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Peter's point is *God's time scale is not like ours*

A 1000 days for Him might look like a day - who knows?

We don't know when Jesus is coming and we don't' know when He's not

Point 2 - Be prepared to wait a long time - that's 2 Thes 2:1-12

Be Prepared to wait - a LONG TIME (2 Thes 2:1-12)

[PowerPoint 7a-Heading]

The gist of these verses is that Paul says certain things must happen before the last day - when Jesus returns

In verses 1 to 3

Paul says the Thessalonians have been unsettled and alarmed (literally shaken up) by false teaching that Jesus has already returned

This false teaching apparently - in verse 2 - has even been claimed to be written or spoken by Paul - when it hasn't

The Thessalonians are shaken up by this, because if Jesus' has already returned - they're wondering why they haven't been taken up to Heaven - in the rapture - as Paul told them would happen back in 1 Thes 4.

But Paul reassures them - in V3 - not to be deceived by this false teaching - He says Jesus will not return until certain things happen - and these certain things haven't happened yet!

So, Paul is saying there is the possibility of a delay - he doesn't specify how long before these certain things happen.

The point Paul is making here - is ***to be prepared for a delay - be prepared to wait a long time***

[PowerPoint 7b-2 things]

See v3 - Two things have to happen before Jesus returns

- a. First -The **rebellion** - a period of time when many turn away from God - with betrayal, hatred, false prophets and many deceived (Jesus prophesied about this in Matthew 24)
- b. Second -The **man of lawlessness** must be revealed - the man doomed for destruction

Paul's saying these 2 things haven't happened - so don't be misled

The Thessalonians may have thought - since they are undergoing severe persecution, they may already be in the rebellion period and because of the false teaching - they thought Jesus had come and they had missed out!

But Paul says not so!

[PowerPoint 7c-temple]

Then Paul describes what this man of lawlessness will be like - see v4

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, **proclaiming himself to be God.**

This is an awful rebellion

But what does it refer to?

These sorts of things have happened in the past

- 200 years before Jesus' birth - Syrian governor, **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** - **sacrificed pigs** in the temple in Jerusalem and set up pagan gods in the temple to worship. He made Judaism and owning the OT - capital offences. This led to the **Maccabean Revolt** - the Jews overthrew Antiochus - and rededicated the temple. The Jews remember this revolt

even today with the feast of *Hanukkah*. So here we have someone setting themselves up as God - just like in v4 - right in the temple of God.

- 15 years before this letter - Roman Emperor Caligula - who was mad - tried to do the same thing. The Romans often made their dead Caesars into gods - but Caligula declared himself God whilst still alive and he even made his horse a god! He also ordered that his own image be set up in the temple in Jerusalem - he hated the Jews - mercifully he died before all his orders were carried out

This had taken place 10 years or so before Paul wrote this letter and he doesn't see this event as being the coming of the lawless one (aka the *antichrist*)

So, is Paul referring to the temple to be destroyed in AD 70?

Or as some have suggested when Paul talks about the temple (in v4), Paul means the church

Because in 1 Cor 3 - he refers to the church as the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16)

So perhaps, Paul means that some sort of rebellion will happen in the church that is so awful that a man of lawlessness takes over the church - demanding worship and authority that only God alone should have

Which is why back in the Reformation days - 500 years ago - the Protestant reformers saw the Pope and the Medieval Roman Church as this man of lawlessness - as the antichrist

What should we make of this?

A couple of other passages might help us here - 1 John 2:18-19

¹⁸ Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

John doesn't say there won't be a **big antichrist** at the end - but that there will be many antichrists until the end - in other words **antichrists** keep coming back

Also, in Revelation chapters 12, 13, 14 - there's a whole unit of thought on this

In Rev 12 - the devil is on display

In Rev 13 - there are two beasts - the first is the antichrist - who comes out of sea - viciously attacking Christians. The 2nd beast is a false prophet - he goes after Christians by using false teaching not violence

The 1st beast - receives a fatal wound but is healed and lives again - fatal wounds usually mean dying - but not so here.

The picture being painted in Revelation is that there are many antichrists - they receive a fatal wound - and they keep coming back

So, there's a sense in which

- Caligula is an antichrist
- The Roman Emperors who set themselves up as lord and god - even on their coins - then they die - they are antichrists

Is that the end of the antichrist? No - the beast comes back

So, in a sense, Pope Innocent III - he's an antichrist

Then Hitler comes along promising a 1000-year Reich - but in 12 years Hitler is gone - the beast receives a fatal wound

As Christians though, we should never think that's the end - and that the beast is gone - the beast receives a fatal wound and comes back

So, we need to be careful that we don't over specify who this Man of Lawlessness (this antichrist) is.

It's the principle that is important

There is a danger of being deceived by counterfeit miracles, false allegiance and false teaching - when rulers and authorities rise up and claim for themselves worship and authority that only God is entitled to
(pause)

V5 says - don't you remember I used to tell you these things

Paul was only with them 3-4 weeks - they had a lot to learn - it's not surprising the Thessalonians didn't remember everything
Especially if there were false teachers as well

Then Paul says v6-7 - that the lawless one is being held back until a proper time - even though his wicked work is already happening - but at some point - the one who holds him back will be taken out of the way?

This is a hotly disputed verse as to who the one holding the Lawless One back - but most likely - it's the sovereignty and providence of God - that holds the lawless one back - until it's God's perfect timing

The bottom line is - though - the final antichrist is not here yet

Then V8 at the perfect time - the Lawless One will be revealed - but He will be overthrown by Jesus - by the breath of his mouth (quoting OT Isaiah 11:4 - with the breath of His lips he will slay the wicked)

And his work will be in accordance with how Satan works - verse 9

As Satan works through the first beast and then the second beast, as in Rev 12, 13 and 14 - It's Satan working with 2 beasts like an *unholy trinity* - using all sorts of signs and wonders to serve up a lie and deceive people who are perishing.

[PowerPoint 8-v10b-12]

Paul warns there is a danger of us being a willing participant - see verse 10b - they perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved

So, in v11-12 - God sends them a powerful delusion - so they believe the lie - and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness

Some people struggle with this idea of God sending a powerful delusion so that they believe the lie? Doesn't God love people and give them another chance?

There is a sense that truth blinds the one who does not want to see it.

Remember the remarkable passage in John 8 - when Jesus says in verse 45 - because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me!

It's the truth itself that they find so repulsive that guarantees their unbelief
If Jesus tells the truth and they don't believe it - what should Jesus do - tell them a lie?

If someone consistently hears the truth of the Gospel time and time again and hardens their heart to it - eventually the truth condemns them.

And so, God sends a judgment on them - a delusion - "okay you don't believe the truth - go ahead believe the lie"

The sentence is already passed you can't go back

(pause)

We shouldn't play with God - the time comes when it's all too late!

The point of this passage - ***Be prepared to wait a long time***

For those who are not believers - they must face the fact that the end comes and they must face judgment - judgement may even fall on them now - no-one can second guess God. He has presented Jesus as the one to save people from sin and death

All of us will give an account to God - the question will be: **what have we done with the truth?**

(pause)

For those of us who are Christians - which the passage is predominantly aimed at.

If we are to be prepared to wait a long time

We need to have something built into a Christian discipleship - for long term planning -

In 2 Tim 2:2 Paul says to Timothy - **And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.**

Regardless of how much we are to be ready for Jesus to return at ***anytime***

Paul tells Timothy to build in to his thinking preparing for the future - in case Jesus' return is ***delayed***

We must do the same

Planning, discipling, mentoring, evangelism and teaching young people - should be in our thinking

Our leadership here at church - should be looking for more Timothies

We should be planning ahead - where will our church be in 20-50 years' time, in case the Lord's return is delayed?

Are we passing the baton on?

[Contrast with King Hezekiah

The prophet Isaiah tells him because of his sin - his descendants suffer and be taken off to Babylon - He says "The word the Lord has spoken is good" (2 Kings 20:19) - how selfish is that? As long as it doesn't affect me? That's awful - epitome of selfishness - only thinking about his own generation. Instead of pleading to God for mercy]

We must be prepared for the delay

Therefore, we are bound - to be thinking and planning for the future

3rd point - which is much shorter - we must be **thankful for a Past Time** - that's verses 13 and 15

[PowerPoint 9-thankful]

Be thankful - for a PAST TIME (2 Thes 2:13-15)

Paul says - in v13 - we should be always thanking God

Because we are loved by God?

How are we loved?

Because he chose us as firstfruits - He chose us from the beginning of time

And He saved us - through His Son's death and resurrection

And He sanctifies us through the HS

And we can now share in the glory of our Lord Jesus - both now and in Heaven

We can't get much farther back than being chosen from the beginning of time

How thankful are we about that? (pause)

Even though we are not in Heaven yet

There are so many things to be thankful for now

His Word, His Spirit, the Communion with our church family, many blessings and answered prayer

So, Paul tells us as we wait, we should ***Stand Firm***

Holding on to this teaching of the word of truth - this Gospel of Jesus

Knowing that our eternity is secure

Standing firm to the truth that God has chosen us in Jesus -

Standing firm to the truth - which will protect us from false teaching

4th we need to ***be occupied in the Meantime*** - verses 16 to 17

Be occupied - in the MEANTIME (2 Thess 2:16-17)

[PowerPoint 10-Meantime]

This takes the form of a prayer

Paul says that Jesus, the Son - and God, the Father - love us and have given us eternal encouragement and good hope.

Eternal encouragement - It's not just encouragement to get through a particular crisis but encouragement that goes into eternity - living in Heaven forever with God

the word for encouragement here is ***parakleis*** - used to describe the HS - the word means encouragement, comfort and guidance, which we receive from the HS.

And Paul says this eternal encouragement leads to ***good hope*** - not just something good around the corner - but the certain promise of Heaven

A couple of weeks ago - we had **John and Nancie Cronshaw** - missionaries from Kenya - here at church - they have started a ministry to encourage a pastor and a school in Kenya - they called their ministry "**Eternal Encouragement**" - to encourage the Kenyans to believe and teach the Gospel, and to stand firm - and look towards eternal life.

In the same way - Paul also tells us to be encouraged in our hearts and be strengthened in every good deed and word - v17 - so we **need to be occupied in the meantime - in ministries of eternal encouragement!**

Conclusion

[PowerPoint 11-Conclusion]

Why should we be encouraged as Christians?

- Because Jesus said - **I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [Hell] will not overcome it. (Matt 16:18)**
- Because Paul said - **Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus (Romans 8:38-39)**
- Because Jesus said **Do not let your hearts be troubled...in my Father's house there are many rooms...and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am" (John 14:1-3)**

Let's pray...