

Model Love

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[0 : 00] Let's have a look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, picking up verse 17. I'll pray and then we'll press into it. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for your word and do write it deep into us.

We do know there is nowhere else to go for eternal life. Your Son has made it open for us and for all who would believe in him. Please help us to understand well your word and the implications of it for our lives.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Hudson Taylor was the first missionary to go to inland China. He first arrived there in 1854 by a ship from England.

And in 1865 he started the China Inland Mission. He along with many others laboured, often through really difficult situations and circumstances, to take the Gospel to the masses and the millions of people who lived in inland China, not just on the coast.

He died in 1905. But the China Inland Mission kept growing after him. Lots and lots of people were saved.

[1 : 11] And lots and lots of churches were started. And that really was his labour of love, to see the Gospel go and to lead the Gospel going into inland China.

All kinds of cultural things he did which were different to bring that about. During the Cultural Revolution, many Christians suffered and died for the faith.

And then in 1950, after the Cultural Revolution, missionaries were effectively shut out of China and removed from China.

And in 1954, the last China Inland Missionary left China. And then after 1954, there was very, very little knowledge of how the Christians who were left behind were faring in China.

And then from 1954 until 1979, no one really knew whether the Christianity had survived in China. Those who were the missionaries in China longed to hear for news about those they'd brought the Gospel to.

[2 : 21] But they heard very, very little. And then when the bamboo curtain went down around 1980, the Christian world was overjoyed and thrilled to hear that not only had Christianity survived in China, but had actually thrived and there were millions and millions and millions of believers, more than anyone could have ever imagined.

And at one level, the history, that's just a brief, brief, brief history of Christianity in China, reflects the early history of Christianity in Thessalonica.

Paul had brought the Gospel of Jesus to them. They had believed and then he was forcibly removed from them.

And he really had no idea how they were going. And he's very, very concerned about whether they would actually still believe, knowing the hardship that they were going to face and they were facing.

Would they stand firm for Jesus? And would they hang in there? Or would they just fold and perish and close and die?

[3 : 34] And so we see here in 1 Thessalonians, Paul's pastoral heart, he's bereaved by not being there. You see it on display, he'd been torn away from them.

You remember, he'd only been there for about three, we'd been there for three Sabbaths, so maximum five weeks, minimum two weeks. He'd been there for about three Sabbaths, he'd been there for about three Sabbaths. He'd been there for about three Sabbaths, he'd been there for about three Sabbaths. And he brought the Word of God to them.

And many had become followers of Christ Jesus, the long-awaited King, the long-awaited Saviour. The one who was not only their King, but was their Saviour.

And they'd been rescued from the power and the penalty of sin and brought into the kingdom of the Son of God. And we see how he's described, he described them in chapter 2, verse 7.

Come back to chapter 2, verse 7. We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother, taking care of her own children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you, not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you become so dear to us.

[4 : 43] And then come down to verse 11, chapter 2. You know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

But in being torn away from them, he uses the word, have a look at chapter 2, verse 17. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you.

The word for torn away is like the other side of being the father, of being the mother. It's the idea of being the orphan. He feels like an orphan, so deep is his connection with these people that he'd seen come to faith in Christ.

That is his heart for the people. He may be absent from them in person, but he's present with them in his heart. He's still there with them in his heart.

And he longs to be with them, long to be with them, but he's prevented by Satan. I don't know in what way he's prevented by Satan from being there, but be assured there is a spiritual reality involved in all opposition to the gospel.

[5 : 56] Satan is the adversary, the opponent of everything good. And at the same time, it's not that Satan won and that God lost, with Paul not being able to go to them.

No, far from that. God is sovereignly in charge, and because Paul couldn't go back to them, he's gone elsewhere. And he's taken the gospel with him to Athens and to Corinth. And so now he's, at one level they are his boast, right?

Chapter 2, verse 19. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown, or boasting, before our Lord Jesus that is coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

The reason he's so bereaved is because they were the fruit of his labour, which God worked through him. At the coming of Jesus, it'll be the Thessalonian believers themselves who are proving his authentic apostleship.

When his work is judged, they will be his reward. It may be that he's been accused of abandoning them, and he's saying, no, no, far from the truth. Some might have felt bitter about that, but Jason had been beaten up, and that you fled from the flogging you might have received.

[7 : 09] But he assures them, no, he's the one who longs for them. He was torn away. He didn't want to go. And notice they are his glory and his joy.

Glory, they currently are the ones that he actually puts ahead and speaks about before people. And they're his joy. That's his own inward feeling towards them.

As one commentator says, the Thessalonian converts are his outward and his inward crown in his ministry. You want to talk about rewards and crowns in heaven.

Well, what is it? It's people who have been established in the faith and are there because of the ministry you've been involved in. And at one level, that's the heart and the boast that all Christian leaders are to have for those in their care.

For the growth group leaders, for the kids' church teacher, for the husband, for his wife, for the parent, for their child, nothing can be more important than to see the people that are in our care standing firm in Christ on that last day.

[8 : 18] That is the most important thing. Nothing can be more important than it happening. And let me assure you, the Christian pastor is the one who loves those who come to faith. He loves those who are in the church.

He loves the ones God's entrusted to his care. Nothing is more important or should be more important to the pastor than that everyone who is in their care makes it safely to glory.

That is the job. And that they persevere in the faith to the end of their life. Make it safely into the hands of the one who's died for them. To the chief shepherd of the sheep, Jesus, and make it into his kingdom for all eternity.

And so Paul couldn't stand it, not knowing how the Thessalonians were going. That had they given up on Jesus? Had they left? Had his work been in vain?

Chapter 3, verse 5. All my labour, a waste of time. I mean, if those who become Christians had given up after Paul had worked so hard to bring the gospel to them and suffered for them, well, that would mean that all that energy and all that effort was just a waste of time.

[9 : 27] He had to find out and so then we see Paul's pastoral plan to send Timothy to them to find out how they're going and to establish and exhort them in the faith.

So he sends Timothy, that's his plan, chapter 3, verse 1. Therefore, when I could spare it no longer, we were willing to be left behind in Athens alone and we sent Timothy, our brother, and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in the faith.

In sending Timothy, Paul and Silas would be left alone there in Athens without him that would be costly relationally. But they were willing to suffer themselves for the sake of the Thessalonians and they were willing to send Timothy their brother in Christ.

That's a family relationship. As the staff team works together, there's an incredible closeness and love and fellowship and bond between them.

And notice though also that Timothy's not only their brother in Christ, their dearly beloved brother in Christ. He's their fellow worker and God's co-worker in the gospel.

[10 : 31] God is in the world at work through Timothy. So while God doesn't need people to do his work, he actually chooses to get work done through his people.

That's the way that God is at work in the world by his word through his people. God works through human agency to bring the gospel into the world.

That's God's strategy for doing it. And that should be our strategy for doing things as well. It's pretty simple. Bring the gospel through people into the lives of people.

That's God's strategy for gospel growth. God and Timothy is not on his own. God doesn't do the work without Timothy.

God and Timothy are co-workers working together. And so those engaged in gospel of Christ work are God's co-workers. That's pretty amazing really, isn't it?

[11 : 37] I can't think of a better person to work with. It's not a bad person to have be your co-worker. God himself, the one who created the world, the one who's infinitely powerful and capable to bring about the things that he wants to do.

Can I just tell you one of the most difficult things we do here at St. Lucia Bible Church is our ministry training strategy. It's costly in all kinds of ways.

The easiest thing we could do is to never tap people on the shoulder and ask them to consider making gospel work their life's work.

Ask them, why not join us for two years? Come and become dearly beloved co-workers with us in the gospel and co-workers of God in the gospel. And then the really hard part is to encourage them to leave, to go, to fly the nest.

Go to Mackay Jai. Go to Gympie Dan. Go to Tasmania Coots. Go wherever Sophie, Percy and Rosie.

[12 : 52] Establish and exhort God's people. Be God's co-workers in the gospel of Christ. And the result is that we sort of feel like we're left almost alone again, aren't we?

That's how it feels. And to start again by raising up and continuing to train up and saying let's get some more Timothys and Timothenas amongst us to be co-workers with the gospel.

And then others amongst us we know have gone to Eurasia and planning on going overseas as well. It's a really difficult thing but a lovely thing to be part of. Timothy is Paul's associate.

he'd been his sort of MTS worker and now he's Paul's sent one and he's sent to establish and to exhort the believers. Now establish doesn't mean that he's to bring them to initial faith.

He has to root them in the truths of the faith. That's what he's got to do. That's the context that he has to bring about. It's not so much to start but to make sure that they continue to grow and roots go down deep so they can stand the wind and the waves of the various doctrines and untruths and pressures and hardships that will blow through in life.

[14 : 17] Stand the wind and the waves and the breakers that will come over them. And yet the very gospel that brings one to faith is the very thing that we need to be establishing and exhorting us in the faith.

The idea of exhort is to encourage, to comfort, to give courage, to urge on in the faith. That's the idea of exhort. Interesting, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit being the comforter, the helper, the one who comes alongside the paraclete.

It's the same kind of word, it's the same word group he used for to exhort. Now if you were going to establish someone in the faith, just think about it with me, if you were going to establish someone in the faith and to exhort them in the faith, what would be the content that you would include in that teaching?

What would be the essentials that you want to actually encourage and exhort people in? what would be your discipleship course? What would you have in it?

What would you want to establish people in? So I'm going to get you to do that now with the people around about you, just talk to the person next to you, what were the things that you'd want to actually be telling the Thessalonians if you were the Timothy?

[15 : 41] And what would you be wanting to establish the new believer in St. Lucia if you were the gospel worker of the Timothy? Have a conversation with the people around about you on that one for a minute or two.

What would be your discipleship content? Curriculum? Okay, I know that you could spend all day on this one and people do, but let's just have a bit of a feedback on some of the things that you want to include in your content or your curriculum of establishing and exhorting people in the faith.

Just jot a hand up and tell us brave soul. What would you include? Mary? Mary? Okay, yeah.

Okay. Josh? We were talking about what he's done, like in Romans 5, what happened? Yeah, okay.

So, establishing because the suffering is going to come, what's happened and what will happen because of what Christ has done. Yeah. Nikki? Nikki? Okay.

[17 : 10] You want to teach them stuff on the work of the Holy Spirit? Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Other things you want to ground people in? Yeah.

Yes, so you want to ground them in the soul of Scriptures, Christ alone, faith alone, Scripture alone. Yeah. Other things?

Jillian? Yeah. Yeah, so it talks about prayer and fellowship, yeah, the place of the prayer and church, yeah, that kind of stuff. Tina?

You got it? Okay, yeah, the importance of gathering with God's people and prayer, yeah? Yeah, good. I think you'd want to include, like, you'd want to make sure that people are grounded, wouldn't you, in the certainty of knowing they're okay with God, not because of works, but because of what Christ has done.

You'd want to establish people in assurance of salvation, Bible and understand the Scriptures, how the Scriptures work, that kind of stuff. Prayer is important, yeah, something about the church gathering we've talked about, yeah, what about telling other people about the hope that you have?

[18 : 28] I think you'd want to establish people in that kind of stuff, wouldn't you? How to explain the Gospel to other people? Maybe you want to teach them about, and we've talked about suffering and why you'd actually might go through suffering and maybe some Gospel generosity as well.

So, verse 3 of chapter 3, we see here that no one be moved by these afflictions for you know yourselves that we were destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we would suffer affliction just as now come to pass and just as you know.

Timothy is to teach them the things that will enable them to persevere through hardship, through suffering. And he's told them that suffering would come, and he told them more than once, and it has actually happened.

Forewarned is forearmed, as the saying goes. Being prepared gives us the right expectations of what's to come. You may have heard the phrase, if you're disillusioned, well then you're suffering from an illusion.

Yeah? And so, you've got wrong expectations, you've got wrong, the situation you're thinking about is not real. And it's for this reason that Timothy is sent.

[19 : 49] His concern is that somehow, somehow Satan, the tempter, may tempt them to give up on Jesus. they might be deceived into thinking that Jesus is not worth it, and that the apostles' labours would have been in vain.

His labour of love, his labour of the gospel of bringing that to them, that may have been in vain. And notice it's the tempter is the one who tempts.

God never tempts anybody. That's James 1 verse 13. But Satan does. He knows something is bad for you, bad for me, and then tempts us to say, it'll be good for you, have a crack at it.

It's the sugar-coated poison, that's the way Satan works. And he would like us just to give up, don't suffer for Jesus, he isn't worth it, he really doesn't love you, life in this world is all there is, enjoy that, I'll give you better, sin is good.

And so now I want to bring home to you Paul's pastoral plea, and just drive it home a bit further, and that is, don't give up on Jesus.

[21 : 21] While Paul was with the Thessalonians, he told them what the gospel was, and what it would look like to believe. Jesus is Lord, that's the nutshell of the gospel, he is the one who is Lord and Saviour, trust in him, wait for him to return from heaven to rescue us from the coming wrath.

That is the gospel in a nutshell, and when we submit to him as Lord and Saviour, we are saved from the righteous wrath to come. And it's a sure sign that we are those who submit to Jesus as Lord, is that just as the world opposed Jesus and hated him, so also the world will oppose and hate his people.

Paul was the case in point, wasn't he? Like the Jews who oppressed the Thessalonians and opposed Jesus, Paul had once been the leader of those who opposed and rounded up and persecuted believers.

But God had brought him to repentance and faith and so to recognise and submit to Jesus and his saving Lordship. One of the strategies of Satan to hinder the gospel is to tempt us to believe that Jesus is not worth it.

That if we suffer as Christians, it's abnormal. If we suffer for our faith in Jesus, that is abnormal.

[23 : 01] That is the strategy that he will use. And Paul's partial plea is this, is to understand that when we suffer for our faith in Jesus, that it is actually normal.

That's normal Christianity. He told that to the Thessalonians. He kept telling them beforehand that they were to suffer. And notice he didn't just tell them once, he told them again and again, therefore, verse 4, when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction.

He told them more than one occasion. Now I'm not a prophet, nor am I an apostle, but God's word tells us that anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

That's 2 Timothy 3, verse 12. It's a good memory verse to have a hold of. And so let's consider for a moment in our lives what that looks like.

Surely we can read about persecution over there, right? Other parts of the world, yes. We read about it in Barnabas Aid and other organisations and even occasionally we read about it on the news.

[24 : 16] And to be sure we're not Thessalonians, but what will it look like here and now in our lives in this world?

You may not feel like we're being persecuted for what we believe, but the truth is God promises that anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Now it doesn't say live a good life, right? That is doing good. Everyone applauds, right? What the world says is good. What it does say is a godly life in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 12.

That is a God would life, a God orientated life, one that's on about the gospel of God, the one that says that Jesus is Lord and lives like Jesus Lord.

And when we do that, well, things will get tough. I wonder if we're prepared to be known as believers. That is the first thing.

[25 : 21] In our world, we might be careful about saying what we think on some things things, for fear of being silenced, for fear of being cancelled, for fear of being seen as the crazy one, for fear of being seen as the wrong side of the current way of thinking, and so to suffer for being differently, for thinking differently even.

I mean, what would it mean when the company wants me to support a particular day that goes against my faith? What do I do? what would it mean for me not to sign off on the things that the company affirms?

What would it mean for the doctor not to refer someone for the abortion at any stage of pregnancy? What does it mean for me to say that I attend St Lucia Bible Church, one of those churches that believes the Bible is true?

Are we willing to be known as a believer? I heard a segment on the radio last week on Tuesday about the crazy backstory of Hitler. How he ever came to power is incredibly crazy.

To get that position of authority. He was a real nutter if you know his background. But let me tell you, people feared him more than they feared God.

[26 : 43] And one thing that Bonhoeffer, the German, who was the anti-Nazi Christian, spoke of was cheap grace. That is, believe in Jesus, but don't be willing to stand out from society if it costs you.

The Christians didn't in Hitler's day and Hitler rose to power without their opposition. Bonhoeffer did oppose him and he died for his stand against Hitler a short time before the Second World War ended.

If we're silent and we fear man more than God, evil people may well be allowed to rise into power and authority.

And if we're silent, evil people may rise to places of prominence in churches and they do. Currently we can say that I won't do that, I'll stand against things because it goes against my Christian faith.

You can do that in our world right now. It goes against my religious convictions. That's an important phrase to be saying. It goes against my Christian faith.

[27 : 59] And so to stand firm in the faith will mark us out as Christians. It may be costly but currently we can say that and there'll be some protection from prosecution if we say that.

Some protection from unfair dismissal if we say those words. In different parts of the world now to be a Christian will mean that you won't get promoted. Our school systems are teaching our children ideologies against the scriptures.

Our universities are enforcing ideologies against the scriptures. Our students are facing a world where being a Christian is now seen as being the bad guy. And Christians in Australia who speak up for Jesus against these things are being maligned.

We need to stand in solidarity with those who stand for Jesus. Whenever or wherever they are ridiculed for their faith or where we are ridiculed for our faith.

If we feel the need to self-censor in what we say for fear of offending some faceless crowd that suffering for the gospel is going to be not really what we want to do, to self-censor is the beginning of giving Satan his way.

[29 : 24] And when you're seen as different in the family for what you believe and it's uncomfortable because you hold what the Bible says, there's a temptation to be moved from the faith we've received, to step back from the truth.

And that will come for our own countrymen, it will come from our own families and for other Australians in Australia. But being warned about this and being prepared to suffer is the important thing.

Now why, why will we think that I'll stand, why will I stand firm, why will I continue on, why would I do that? I'll do it if I think Jesus is worth it.

Because he is the one God raised from the dead and will deliver us from the wrath to come. He's worth it. He's the one who provides a sure and certain hope beyond the woes and the vanity of this world.

He's worth it. He's the one who loves us more than any human pastor. He's shed his blood for us. He's worth it. He's the only one who can provide forgiveness for sins.

[30 : 37] He's the only one who can rescue us from the judgment and the wrath of God to come. He's the only one who can raise us from the dead. He's the only one who has proved this by dying for us and then being raised to life and never to die again.

He's the one who is the real hope for our world. He's the only one worthy of our trust. He's the only one worthy of our praise. He's the only one worthy of our lives for he's no one less than God the Son.

And he promises that all who honour him as Lord and Saviour will have both suffering and blessing in this world and in the world to come. Life eternal. So when the tempter comes and he will as he has, when affliction for the faith comes and it will if it hasn't already, may it be that we hold on to the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and bring honour and glory to him who is worth it.

Let me pray. Our Father, we heard the good news that the Thessalonians who'd become believers persevered through suffering and we've heard of our modern day history of how the Christians in China continue to believe through suffering.

And Father, we pray for ourselves that we'd be a people who continue to hold on to Jesus no matter what, no matter what suffering and trials and temptations come our way, that we might live to his praise and glory.

[32 : 16] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.