



This week at MRC we finished our series in 2 Thessalonians as Paul brought the letter to a close by sharing some prayer points for him, but also giving us some more insight into the situation in Thessalonica.

The big idea that we've hung our 2 Thes series around has been that when we know what the future holds, we know what to focus and prioritise now. The Thessalonians problem had been there were some among the church who were claiming Jesus had already returned and so unsettling and confusing the rest of the church. Paul's consistent message had been to stand firm and hold fast to the teaching he had given; Jesus is still to come, justice is still to be seen. The plan has not failed, it's just not finished yet.

+ (1) When you know what's coming you know how to pray (v1-2)

Paul's asking for prayer is not simply 'religious platitudes' or 'vacuous requests,' but rather he's aware of his weakness and so of the need for the prayers of others. He asks for

1. **Spread** (v1) - that the gospel would spread and take hold. The Thessalonians themselves were examples of how the gospel could transform (see 1 Thes 1v6-8). Paul knows this is supernatural and so needs to be something that God does. If Jesus is still to return and will one day bring justice (see chapter 1 for example) it is imperative that we be sharing that gospel with friends.

2. **Safety** (v2) - strikingly Paul asks for deliverance and safety as he shares the gospel. He can easily come across as a bit of a 'superman' and yet here we see a very practical request that God takes care of him. Again the context in Thessalonica means that they will 'get it'. When they first met Paul he had to leave 3 weeks later due to oppression and opposition.

+ (2) When you know what's coming you know how to live (v3-15)

Here we get more of an insight into the situation at the church. Again, we're only listening in to one side of the proverbial phone-call so we have to piece together what's going on - but it seems a splinter group within the church - who think Jesus has returned - are sponging off everyone else. On Sunday we initially focused in on what Paul 'positively' wants for them at each end of the chapter - namely v4-5 and v13. The focus of v5 is key in this in that he wants their hearts to be increasingly focused in the right place - on God's love and Christ's perseverance. Our danger is the default for our hearts to seek to serve in our own strength, but when these things are in place we have the fuel for long-term service.

The irony is that Paul's example had been deliberate in wanting to work hard so as to not be a burden to them, but their situation now was that a group from within were not working hard and were being a burden! We called them the 'deliberate disruptives' - idle and so scrounging off everyone else and so disrupting the church. Paul's advice for them is to shun these people so that they will be ashamed and return to orthodox theology and lifestyle. Paul had in his previous letter sought to help them know how to deal with them (1 Thes 5v14 - note that it's not simply that Paul has no time for people who are more complicated), and so is wanting the church to be discerning as to who to help.

The reason this matters so much is that it potentially divides the church and so undo the work of the cross. Where Jesus was not idle but worked and laboured for us to bring unity, so being idle and disruptive is the exact of antithesis of his unifying work.

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Here are a few questions to help start your group off

- v1-2. What does Paul want prayer for here? How might that translate for us?
- V3-15. What insights can we glean from the situation in Thessalonica? How did Paul want them to deal with the 'idle and disruptive' faction? What had Paul's example been? (See also 1 Thes 2) Why does disunity matter so much?
- How does v5 help us to keep serving?