

PEOPLE YOU TAKE HEART FROM

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Paul wrote this letter when in Corinth. It followed soon after he had sent the letter we call 1 Thessalonians. One of the things that he develops from his first letter is the matter of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Evidence of good things.

Paul twice states that he is bound to recognise what the Lord is doing in the lives of the people he is writing to (v3, 2:13). The evidence that the Lord is at work in their lives is overwhelming and Paul can write with words like 'abounding' and 'exceedingly' to show just how great a work that the Lord had begun in them, which was now so evident.

Paul is not a man to say things that were not true about people. When things are not right he is strong in pointing this out (See 1 Corinthians 11:17-18; Galatians 3:1-4). Our Lord is also strong in issuing rebuke where it is justified (See Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3). But where Paul (and our Lord) see things that are to be commended, they also point this out. This is what Paul is doing here to encourage the people that they are real and genuine believers.

Do we thank God when we see good things in people that clearly show us that the Lord is at work? Or do we stay silent and say nothing (See Proverbs 27:5). Paul, for example, tells the believers in Philippi that he rejoiced when they showed their love to him again (Philippians 4:10). Paul relays his experience in 1 Thessalonians that news the church was faring well in his absence caused him great rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:6-10). He can see that the Lord is at work in them and that they have fully followed the Lord's will.

We ask ourselves if people can see in us anything that would make them give thanks to God for what they could see in us? Would they be able to discern the evidence that the Lord was truly at work in our lives?

2. Faith – an evidence to give us heart.

Being able to recognise faith in someone is one clear evidence that things are going well with the person's soul and from which we can take heart. Faith is reported in 1 Thessalonians 1: 3 as an evidence of the Lord's grace in them. We see it shown to us by the tenacious way that people hold to the promises of God. Also, we can see that they have taken to heart the Lord's warnings, believing that there is wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). They are living as if the Day of the Lord was right before them. They

are viewing unseen realities as though those things were right there before their eyes. They were responding to those unseen things as though they were present with them and were making choices that showed they believed in those things implicitly. People of faith forego personal pleasure and sin because they believe there is something far better to be found in the Lord (Hebrews 11:25). They pass up what the world looks on as pleasures, such as sexual immorality, drunkenness and the like. They also forego any earthly advantages or gains that could be achieved by, for example, lying. They are not searching out money or to be esteemed by other people of the world. We look, as people of faith, beyond the things that are seen to the things that are not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith is also seen in that we look to evangelise other people so that they too can share in the wonder of the world to come and escape the wrath that will befall all the people on earth. We show that we value the immortal soul of the person and are willing to go out of our comfort zone to bring this important news to them. We also show that we prefer non-recognition if it means losing our testimony and, we refuse to join in the world and its ways, as so many churches do.

Such faith is to be connected with endurance and patience, which Paul commends here. Again, these are aspects of church life that Paul has previously spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. It shows that these people are willing to continue to make progress despite the difficulties they face. 'Persecution' is the specific term for the troubles that are brought against Christians because of their Christian faith. 'Afflictions' refer to more general troubles of all kinds that befall believers. These people are to be commended because they have overcome pain, trouble, and distress. They have not weakened (See Philippians 1:27-28). Too often the Western church has been terrified by what people will say against them on Twitter. They conform to the world because they do not want to be ill thought of or spoken against. These people that Paul knew had suffered ridicule but had stayed the course. Paul takes heart from this and thanks God for them.

3. Love – another evidence to give us heart.

The presence of love in the heart of the believer is another reason why we might thank God for that person and take great heart from them. Again, love is singled out in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. (See also Colossians 1: 3-4; Ephesians 1: 15-16). It is not the size of the church that is important. But love is important. This will be seen by people getting on well, by goodwill that is shown, warmth, trust, generosity, appreciation of one another and care shown to each other. There will be an absence of boasting, point-scoring, and the parading of knowledge. There will be no self-justification, defensiveness and suspicion. People will not be self-centred, spending money and time on themselves, rather than on other people.

This would seem to be the failure in the church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:4-5). It speaks of a want of prayer in the life of the church. Where there is prayer for people there is evidence of care for people.

Love is often wanting because people are too busy or too distracted. Perhaps sometimes they are embroiled in their own inner struggles and battles that they have no emotional energy left to love with.

Sanctification works to deepen us as people and to free up space in the soul to be able to love people instead. Love is an evidence of sanctification. Its absence is a sign that we are wanting spiritually. We must always be ready to purge old ideas, thinking and habits in order to grow in holiness. Then we will love people more freely, and so we will be the kind of people that other Christians will take heart from.