

The pandemic over the past year has impacted our lives in many different and unexpected ways. But one thing has amazed me, and that is you don't hear a lot about this being the end of the world or the beginning of Tribulation prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Usually some "Chicken Little" starts sounding the alarm whenever there's a major crisis; but not so much this time.

Remember back in 2017 when David Meade predicted that the world would end on April 23 based on the alignment of the planets. Then in 2011, there was a similar warning by a Christian radio host and evangelist named Harold Camping that the Rapture would happen on May 21, which prompted many of his followers to quit their jobs and sell everything they owned. When it didn't happen, Camping simply said that he got the day wrong! Remember Y2K, when there was a fear that all the computers would shut down as we entered the year 2,000, and there would be worldwide chaos. I had to go to my office in Santa Fe after midnight on January 1 and email my Washington Headquarters Office that we were all alive and well in New Mexico. With all that's happened over the last year, I'm amazed that the doomsayers haven't come out of the woodwork.

Ever since Jesus ascended back into heaven, people have been trying to predict when the end of the world, the Day of the Lord and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ would occur. Many of the early Christians believed that Jesus would return during their lifetime. The Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians deals with this issue. Let's see what he has to say about this in the third chapter of 2 Thessalonians, verses 6 through 13.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Thessalonica was a major seaport named for the half-sister of Alexander the Great. It was the largest city in Macedonia. Paul had earlier made a missionary trip there and established a Christian community. As with many of the early churches, there were some initial problems and misconceptions about what to do. Paul writes two letters to the Thessalonians to provide them some fatherly advice. Both letters concerned the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In the first letter Paul insists that the Day of the Lord, the day of judgment, will come like a thief in the night when nobody expects it, and urges them to be alert.

Unfortunately, this produced an unhealthy situation where some people did nothing but watch and wait. Over time the Thessalonians had developed some misconceptions about the Second Coming. As we discussed in our Wednesday night class, some false teachers had stated that the Second Coming had already happened, and then there were those who thought it would happen in their lifetime. As can happen with a sermon or a lesson, some parts of Paul's first letter had been misunderstood, and certain things had been taken out of context and over-

emphasized. So, Paul writes a second letter a short time later to set the record right, and to correct any misconceptions. He explains what signs must occur first before the Second Coming will happen.

It seems that some in Thessalonica got the idea that since the Lord might be coming back at any time, why plan for the future; why make any preparations. In that case, why even work? So some in the congregation simply sat back and took it easy. They gave up their work and abandoned the routine duties of everyday life to wait in idleness for Christ's return, letting other Christians take care of them while they sat around gossiping their lives away, and living off the generosity of others.

To show them the error of their ways, Paul used himself as an example. He modeled a behavior of honest and fair compensation for a day's work regardless of the fact that he might have been entitled to special privileges since he was a minister of the gospel. All of his life Paul had been a man who worked with his hands, earned his keep. Now the Jews glorified work. They had a saying that "he who does not teach his son a trade, teaches him to steal." Paul had been trained as a rabbi, but the Jewish law said that a rabbi must take no pay for teaching. Thus, a rabbi had to learn a trade in order to support his family. We are told that Paul made his living as a tentmaker.

In this passage, Paul implies that a preacher should earn his keep and not just work one hour a week as one man in Grants once accused me of doing. Did you hear the story of the little boy who went up to his pastor after the worship service one morning and said: "When I grow up, I'm going to give you some money." "Well, thank you," replied the preacher, "but why?" "Because my daddy says that you are the poorest preacher that we have ever had!"

Jesus Christ Himself was a carpenter and legend has it that He made the best yokes for oxen in all of Palestine and that people came from all over to buy them. It is said that a tree is known by its fruits and a person is known by their work.

The Jews believed in the dignity of honest work, and they were sure that a scholar lost something when he became so academic and so withdrawn from life that he forgot how to work with his hands. Unfortunately, we can all cite examples today of people who have lost touch with the real world and the art of making an honest living by hard work. I wonder how many people today could last even a few hours working with my friend Dan Kloss on his alfalfa farm in Lemitar; by the way, Dan is 85 years old and still going strong.

In this passage, Paul quotes a familiar saying that has been handed down through the years: "If a person refuses to work, he doesn't eat." The Bible promises no loaves of bread for the loafers. Or as a Danish proverb puts it: "God gives every bird its food, but He doesn't throw it into the nest." This has been called "the golden rule of work."

My Dad strongly believed in this rule. When I was a child, one of my tasks was to bring in the milk cow each evening so she would be in the barn for milking the next morning. One day I had been playing ball with my friends until it got dark and came home late. I forgot to get the cow and sat down at the supper table. Guess what? I was told that I could not eat until the cow was in the barn. Now it was dark and there were snakes all around the creek where that old cow liked to hide. Believe me, I was scared and I learned a valuable lesson that night; one I have never forgotten!

Now please note that it is the refusal to work that is important and critical to properly understanding Paul's statement here. This has nothing to do with the unfortunate person who, through no fault of their own, cannot find work or is physically unable to work. This statement should never be used to deny assistance to anyone in need. Paul is focusing on lazy people who refuse to work and expect others to take care of them.

One of the negative results of the laziness of the people in Thessalonica was that they had more time to spend sitting around and gossiping. We have all heard the phrase: "idle hands are the devil's workshop." These words are usually interpreted to mean that when one has little or nothing to do, little or no good can be accomplished. Paul intensely disliked busybodies. There may be greater sins than gossiping but there is none which can do more harm in the church, family or community than gossip. A person who is doing their own work with all their strength will not have enough time to worry about the affairs of others and spread gossip.

We must be periodically reminded of this teaching so that we do not fall into the same trap of taking it easy. Paul set the example for us as did Jesus. Thus, we are also called to set the example for others. Yes, we are all waiting with anticipation for the Second Coming of the Lord, but because we don't know when it will happen, we should not worry about it or become obsessed with it. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus tells us that no one knows the exact day or time of the Second Coming; only God knows, and He's not telling anyone. Jesus warned us to be prepared, to live each day the best we can.

In this passage, Paul is telling us the same thing. Throughout Paul's letters to the early churches, there is a constant call to endure, to be faithful, and to persevere. Verse 15 in our text is key; here Paul encourages us to not become weary in doing good. To the Galatians, he wrote in the sixth chapter: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Now there are some people and some churches that ascribe to the teachings of John Calvin on predestination and believe that since they are predestined to spend eternity with God, they like the Thessalonians can sit back and take it easy. Then there are those who have faithfully served

the Lord for many years and now think that they can sit back and take it easy; that they have earned enough merit points to get them into heaven.

Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't buy into either one of these concepts. Based on the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25, I believe that each one of us has been given gifts and talents by God to be used in His service, and that His work is not complete until Jesus comes again. And until He comes, we as Christians are called to live each day the best we can for Him, using the time, gifts and resources that He has given to us to spread His message and to love our neighbors. Yes, many of us are retired, but we are not dead yet. We may not be able to do all we did twenty years ago, but we can still pray, tell others about the Lord, visit those who are shut-ins, and hundreds of other things that will make life better for those around us. Remember Moses was 80 years old when God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

All of us are expected to do our part as individuals and as a community of faith to bring God's kingdom here on earth. The expected return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ does not make our daily work pointless. On the contrary, our belief in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ adds meaning to what we do. We are to live every day not in idle expectation but in faithful service. God gives us the ingredients for our daily bread, but He expects us to do the mixing and baking!

We are called to make a difference in this world, to leave things better than we found them. Think about it – if each person did their best for the Lord each and every day what a difference it would make in the world around us. Now I know that this reflects an ideal world and that some people will not do their share or even do anything. They will be just like the lazy Thessalonians that Paul wrote to over 2,000 years ago.

But do you remember the story of the man who was walking along the beach one morning at daybreak. He noticed a young boy ahead of him picking up starfish and throwing them back into the ocean. Catching up with the boy, he asked him what he was doing. The boy told him that the stranded starfish would die if they were left on the beach until the morning sun hit them. "But the beach goes for miles, and there are thousands of starfishes," countered the older man. "How can your effort make a difference?" The young boy looked at the starfish in his hand and threw it back into the safety of the ocean. "It makes a difference to this one," he replied.

The way of Jesus Christ is clear: love and service. Examples are all around us. We can't change the world overnight, but each one of us can do our part to make this a better place to live and to show God's love through our daily activities, work and acts of service to those around us. If you open your life to Jesus, He will make a difference in you and your attitude toward life. The best way to build a better world is to live like Jesus every day. As Paul says, let us never tire in doing good and the Lord's work.

At the Women with Purpose meeting in May, Wanda Golsan gave each lady in attendance a \$5 bill and asked them to use it to do something good for somebody; in other words, to pass it on. The ladies used their \$5 in many different ways. Some bought supplies to make cookies that they took to homebound neighbors; other bought flowers; Judy paid for the meal of the car behind her at McDonald's. Many matched the \$5 and did more. At our Ministry Team meeting in June, Gordon shared how Lisa Isenberger bought some fabric and made a comfort bag with a bear and blanket. As a result of this effort, contact was made with the Rio Rancho Police Department, and at the June Women with Purpose meeting, 25 comfort bags were assembled to be distributed to local children during police crisis situations. There are many other stories which remind me of our Responsive Reading from the Parable of the Mustard Seed in Mark 4. God can do amazing things with any act of love done in His name. As illustrated in the feeding of the 5,000, a little in the hands of the Lord is much.

I was so impressed and moved by these stories that I thought why not do it churchwide. So I approached the Ministry Team and they unanimously approved giving each one of you \$10 to pass it on. So, as you leave this morning, you will receive a \$10 bill and a form to report back how you passed it on. Let's plant as many mustard seeds as we can and see how we can share God's love in our community. Amen