



BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

PO BOX 552 • BELLVILLE • 7535
 LINGEN STREET • BELLVILLE • 7530
 TEL: 021 948-2417 / 021 948-2529
 FAX: 021 948-2419
 e-mail: bellville@presbyterian.org.za

HEAVENLY MINDS, EARTHLY POWER

1 Thessalonians 1

~ Brent Russell ~

- So here it is as Rod said last week that I get to open the batting in our continued sermon series and outline until the middle of the year
- For the next 6 weeks until Pentecost we will work together through 1 and 2 Thessalonians
- **Short, but powerful little books**
- **Packed with information** that will help you grow and develop as Christians
- And much of the focus of the books is about the **second coming of Christ**
- And so we will keep this at the forefront of our preaching
- Every time we share in the sacrament of **Holy Communion**
- The Lords supper
- The scripture we read from **1 Corinthians 11** ends with the words "When we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lords death **until He comes again**"
- In this **most central part of our life as Christians**, this meal in which we are reminded that we are in Jesus and he lives in us
- **His coming again is central**
- If you read the book of **Acts**
- The acts of the Apostles – the life and times of the early church
- **And in fact if you read almost any part of the NT you will see that the second coming of Jesus is spoken of very often**
- It is a central theme in the life of this early church
- It is a central theme in almost all the books of the NT

Read 1 Thessalonians 1

In fact 1 out of 30 verses in the NT speaks of Jesus coming again

- **It is this perhaps that drives them more quickly to spread the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth**
- **It is this idea that Jesus may return at any time that encourages them to live lives worthy of Him – a striving to holiness**
- **It is the idea that he will come again that persuades them to celebrate communion regularly**
- **Sharing in the meal of remembrance and to keep them hoping for the second coming**
- It seems that the second coming of Jesus is the **ants in the pants** of their early life
- It is their **motivation**
- It is their **drive, their stimulus**
- It is this idea perhaps more than any other that keeps the church on her toes always waiting, always hoping, always living in expectation
- It is what drives and compels her forward and onward
- As much as the faith of this young church produced in her
 - **Works produced by faith**
 - **Labours to love others**
 - **Perseverance in hope**
- The faith that the church had was also rooted in this unwavering belief in the coming again of Jesus the Christ
- **In vs 9 Paul has heard how this small church has turned from idolatry to God**
- **And how they now wait for Jesus to come again**

- **I read passages like this and I confess that I compare the church in 2005 to this early body of believers written to by Paul**
- I **compare us** as a congregation to the Thessalonians
- And I think in some areas we are doing **extraordinarily well**
- And in other I think we need to **re-look what we are doing**

- **So let me paint a picture for you**
- **I want you to imagine two churches**
- The first is in a little town in Greece called Thessalonica
- And the second an imaginary church in Cape Town South Africa
- I want to compare them side by side using the statements that Paul makes about this church in Thessalonica
- And I have played with some ideas that are apparent in the modern church
- Please note not necessarily BPC

vs	Thessalonian Church	Imaginary Church
3	Work produced by faith	Apathy produced by comfort
3	Labour prompted by love	Laziness because we work out of obligation
3	Endurance inspired by hope in Jesus	We often quit because we lose hope in ourselves
4	Sense of being chosen	We often have no sense of call at all
5	Gospel came with words and with Power	Gospel comes with only with words and indifference
5	Gospel came with the Holy Spirit	Gospel comes with the emptiness of emotionalism
5	Gospel came with deep conviction	Gospel comes with great scepticism
6	Imitators of Paul and of the Lord	Imitators of the world
6	Welcomed the message with Joy	Welcomed the message with polite approval
7	Model to other believers	Not always something we would want anyone to follow
8	Their faith is known everywhere	People living within 200m hardly know about them
9	How they turned from idols to the living and true God	Turning from the living and true God to dead Idols

- As I reflected on the difference between the modern church and this church from a strange sounding place in Thessalonica
- **What was it that made this Thessalonian church so incredible?**
- Paul only has good things to say of them
- I began to ask God what is so different today
- Would Paul have as much praise for us?

- What is it that has created this discrepancy between us and them
- It seems to my mind obvious that we as a modern church are in places quite different from this early church

- And as I wrestled and reflected with this issue in light of this passage

- **At least one major difference is how seriously we take the second coming of Christ**
- **Noooo, Brent you cannot be serious!**
- Well actually I am being entirely serious

- **I believe that belief in the second coming of Christ is one of the most important differences between churches that live up to Christ's expectations like this Thessalonian church**
- And those that fail to measure up to his desires for them

- **A simple but powerful link between our earthly effectiveness and ministry and our belief in the second coming of Christ**

- You have heard it said of someone who is too religious that they are **so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly value**
- And I have said before that we can be **so earthly minded as to be of no heavenly value**
- **Well I believe this is one of those cases where we have to be heavenly minded so that we can have earthly value**

- **It has been said that the church has to be otherworldly to have any effect in this world**
- We are not a **social institution**
- We are not simply a **social relief** organization
- **We are ambassadors from another world bringing a message of Christ**

- Are you with me here?
- **I am suggesting that unless the church is somehow quite differently minded to the world we have nothing to give to the world**

- Unless we think in an entirely different way we are just like the world
- **Unless we have our eyes clearly fixed on heaven we cannot have otherworldly influence here and now**

- In fact in Jesus life this link between heavenly thinking and earthly action is clearly mentioned in John 13
- **John 13:3** Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

- **You see it is this heavenly mind set that motivates Jesus into action in this world**
- **It is this reminder of where he came from and where he is going that makes him act in a certain way in this world**
- **It is this heavenly mindedness that allows Him to minister with heavenly power**

- **And we are called friends to imitate Christ**
- **To be constantly reminded that we belong in heaven**
- **To often we make two common mistakes in our mindsets**
- **Places where we can deviate from the example set by the church in Thessalonica**

- **We can be too heavenly minded**
 - There are those who are so 'spiritual' that they think and talk only of heaven
 - They wonder what it will be like
 - They cannot wait to get there
 - Every aspect of their lives is **overly spiritualised**
 - And these are good things expect when taken to this extreme
 - **The problem is they produce little or no earthly action**
 - **There is no faith effect**

 - There is little or no practical power in their ministry
 - They are so busy looking to heaven that they fail to see the world around them

- **We can be too earthly minded**
 - There are also those who are so earthly minded that they think and talk only of earthly action
 - Of social issues and problems
 - They do good works
 - They help the poor and the needy
 - **But they are so busy looking to the ground that they fail to see the bigger picture**
 - **They are so focused on practical needs that they may often forget about heaven**
 - They look good, do good, act good (I know the English is bad..)
 - **But they have failed to do anything on earth of any eternal worth because they operate from earthly power not heavenly power**

- Clearly this church in Thessalonica is something a little different to either of these two examples
- As Paul ends chapter one it is speaking of their waiting for Jesus to return
- If you want to continue the illustration of either looking up to heaven too much
- Or looking down to earth too much
- **By focusing on the second coming of Christ**
- **We focus to heaven and earth**
- **Because we wait for him to come from heaven to earth**
- **It keeps our lives in balance**
- **I really believe that as we focus our faith at one level on Jesus coming again we will be reminded and empowered with things from heaven**
- If we keep focused on Jesus and His second coming we cannot forget that we belong to heaven
- Friends we don't belong here – we really do belong in heaven
- And it is these reminders of heaven
- **These reminders of our eternal nature**
- That will help us produce in our lives, earthly fruit
- **Desmond Tutu at the funeral of Walter Sisulu used this illustration**
- About a traveller who came upon a farm and rested there for some days
- In the yard amongst the chickens was an eagle
- But it acted just like a chicken
- It had fallen out of its nest from a nearby koppie and had simply called the chicken pen home
- The traveller took the eagle to top of the koppie early one morning and threw it into the wind
- And all of sudden the bird instincts are awoken and off it flies
- The power in the second coming is to constantly remind us that we do not belong here
- And to remind us that we can be filled with things from heaven

- If I return to the list that I used in the beginning from the passage
- You see that each of these heavenly things produces an earthly fruit
- If we keep our eyes focused on heaven it produces fruit within us that has eternal earthly value

Vs	Heavenly thing	Earthly fruit
3	Faith	Work
3	Love	Labour
3	Hope	Endurance
4	Call / being chosen	Security
6	Gospel	Imitation of Christ
7,8	Faith	Witness
9	Power of Gospel	Turning them to God and will turn others too
10	Belief in Christ's second coming	Effective and powerful ministry

Conclusion

- The second coming of Christ is going to be one of those incredible events in earths history
- Vastly different and more spectacular and awesome than His first coming
- Our belief in the second coming of Christ assures us that there is a heaven
- And that we too will go there
- By understanding the second coming of Christ this earthly church in Thessalonica was empowered by God to be a powerful and effective church
- And so in the words of one of our well known songs

Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Look full in his wonderful face

And things of this world will grow strangely dim

In the light of His Glory and grace