



SILVER STREET MISSION

Regular Sermon 2006

Faith and love

I Thess 2: 17 – 3:13

Rev. Peter R Green, Sunday morning, 22 Jan, 2006

EVERY MAY, I go to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital for a blood test. I have a blood condition, but no symptoms at the moment, and I am always keen to hear if the results are good.

The first time I went, Chris came in and sat with me; the last time, I said she needn't come, but she only agreed if I promised to phone as soon as I was out. My mother wanted to be told as soon as I could, too.

Everyone wants to hear results.

Paul was the same with the Thessalonians. They were like children to him, and he was anxious to hear that they were safe and well.

One of the girls at work is a migrant, and a few of us quietly check on her.

Recently she apologised for not letting me know where she was when she was away for two days. She didn't want me to worry.

Paul felt deeply for the Thessalonians, as though they were orphans whom he had adopted, or migrants away from their families.

He was passionate about them. He wrote,

^{1TH 2:17} But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan stopped us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

Whether you are talking about a church or one of your friends, remember that these principles flow through to all our relationships. We practice on Sunday what we will do in the rest of the week.

And Paul gives us three very simple but important principles. These are:

- Get the facts;
- Find strength in the positives;
- Build faith and love.

Get the facts

Sometimes people say things that irritate me so much I can never forget what they said.

One of those occasions was when someone said, "Never assume: **Assume** makes an **ass** out of **u** and **me**."

I flinch just to repeat it. But that was the idea. You can't forget a saying like that.

^{1TH 3:1} So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ² We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

There was plenty for Paul to worry about, but he wasn't panicked. He could wait for a report. He wanted to know accurately for himself what was really happening in Thessalonica.

At times, I have been overly worried about people. Sometimes, of course, we *should* be worried, and I have been worried about my wife, Chris, a few times in recent years, because she has been very ill more than once.

When a good friend was flying into far western NSW by light aircraft it was a very windy day, and I was overly worried about that flight. How silly! The pilot would have all the meteorological reports and everything else to decide whether it was safe to fly.

When you get overly worried, it means that you are thinking about yourself. You think, “Where would I be if I lost this person? What would it do to *my* sense of security? Would I get a bad reputation?” It’s the impulse to rescue. Everyone needs help, but we rarely need to be rescued.

Paul was certainly worried for them, but he gave them space to work through their own issues. He knew that they would only grow strong if they had to struggle for themselves.

But, at the same time, he got the facts. He waited so long, ’til he couldn’t wait longer. He says,

1TH 3:1 So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ² We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials.

It wasn’t for his own benefit that he sent Timothy, but so that the Thessalonians could have their faith strengthened.

Sometimes the temptation to step in and take control can get too strong for us. Sometimes the rescuing impulse can take over.

Maybe Paul knew he would be tempted to take over and rescue. He certainly made sure that he didn’t give in to the temptation.

A friend of mine was going through a really tough time in his church. It was worse because people in the church were dragging in outsiders to take sides. The church wasn’t far away from my home, and I was really strongly tempted to become involved. I didn’t want to take sides, but I wanted to see sense prevail, I wanted to be a referee so that they played fair.

But I that was a rescuing impulse, and I decided instead to support my friend as much as I could, which was probably more appropriate.

When people we care about are going through tough times, it’s great to know their needs. It’s great to make ourselves available to them in case. But it’s also great to sand back a little. Send someone else to get the facts. When you take over, you say to that person, “I think you are incapable. I think you don’t know what you are doing.” When you do that you disempower the person, and make him or her dependent on you.

Paul wouldn’t even let it seem that he would do that. He sent Timothy to get the facts.

When you care for someone, say, “I am there for you.” But don’t take over. Be informed. Pray. Check that your friend is OK. But leave space for your friend to manoeuvre.

When we suddenly had to take on my brother’s baby daughter when his wife was ill and in hospital, we had had no preparation for that. We had no baby things — we had already had Hannah. We were out of practice. We didn’t know where we might end up in that situation. But there were people here — Gwen and Kevin, Jackie Mack, Neph and Divina, to name a few — we knew we could depend on them, and that they were there if they were needed.

That’s what loving relationships are about.

Find strength in positives

The report Paul received from Timothy was far better than Paul could have hoped. The church was doing extremely well. They had fond memories of Paul and his team.

I like to imagine the scene when Timothy arrives. He had experienced churches that had failed. They would preach somewhere, and a few people believed, but they soon fell away. There are a few hints about that in *Acts*, but I am mainly speaking from experience — not everyone goes on in faith. The Bible is not going to waste space telling us about where nothing much, good or bad, happened.

So Timothy didn't know what to expect in Thessalonica.

I imagine him just turning up at their Sunday meeting, in someone's house. The service they had planned can't even get started. The people are so excited. It's Timothy! They all want to know how he is, and how are Paul and Silas. They want to hear stories of how the mission is going, are people coming to Christ in all the towns they come to?

What a relief! If they had failed, they'd be guilty. They'd be expecting criticism. But their life of Christ flows among them, and they are full of joy!

And Timothy wants to hear how they are all going. In the end, they have a short reading from the Bible and a long time of excited prayer, and they all go off for lunch together, talking, talking, talking all the time.

We all know what it is like.

Imagine if Nick and Elise and the kids came one morning. We'd be pretty much the same.

But Timothy isn't just observing how pleased they all are to see him again. He's also looking at the congregation. There are new people since last time. Demetrios, the drunk is still there — "Haven't been drunk for two years!" he boasts. The gospel is impacting on lives.

1TH 3:6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.

It is more than anyone expected. Jesus is still fully at work among the Thessalonians! Faith and love — those two vital qualities — are still at the forefront of their lives.

John wrote,

1JN 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Love goes right to the heart of living as a Christian, because love is the primary characteristic of God himself. God is love — we show the love of God as we display love for the world to see.

Not only did Paul encourage the Thessalonians to live in faith and love, the Thessalonians encouraged Paul by their faith:

7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.

It's so true. Each of us builds the other up.

Chris passed on a little comment to Rachel, one of the girls at work. Rachel said she was giggling half the night, because the comment fitted her situation so well. In the afternoon, Rachel was still laughing about the situation.

I left the office with a big smile because Rachel had passed a big smile on to me.

I passed a young woman in the street. I have no idea who she was. But she saw me smiling, and she smiled at me, as though we joyfully greeted each other every day.

Isn't that how it goes? We pass our happiness on — and our sadness. And we pass our faith and our love on as well. It even returns to the sender from time to time.

Find strength in positives. It works whether you are at church, or at home, or at work.

Build faith and love

Paul could not stop with the church where it was. He always hoped for and worked towards growth. If a church had faith and love, it needed more faith and love.

He wrote to the Romans that there is a righteousness which comes from God which is by faith from beginning to end. Literally, he says it is "from faith, unto faith", but that doesn't say much to us in English.

But the idea is that this righteousness arises from faith and its purpose is the creation of faith; it comes out of faith and it builds faith.

Here Paul isn't discussing righteousness; he is concerned with faith and love, and he is gov-

erned by that same principle. Faith builds faith, if you let it. And love builds love.

He writes,

¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Paul prays for the Thessalonians so that they will develop the positives they already have, and will have more of what they need to survive in a hostile world.

He wants their love to increase and overflow and their faith — that's what will strengthen their hearts — he wants their faith to grow and build their strength to face the world.

Application

Some years ago, one of our members compiled a video which showed the people of this church in various settings. It showed us as not very friendly towards one another, not very community-minded, very self-focused.

We decided to look at it one night and see what needed change.

As we were preparing, a couple of car-loads of strangers arrived at the church. I decided that we should go ahead with the video despite the visitors.

After the video, I asked for discussion, and several of our people picked up the negatives.

Then the newcomers spoke. They were part of a mission group that worked with people with disabilities, and they had felt led that morning to visit our church, so they came.

They acknowledged all our negatives, and then they went through and pointed out so many positives. They turned the entire night around. We came away feeling that there was hope, because, although it was imperfect, we *did* have faith, and, although it had its weaknesses, we *did* have love.

There is a prophecy in Isaiah about God's servant — about Jesus. It says,

**MT 12:20 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.
^{12:21} In his name the nations will put their hope."**

Where Jesus finds something worth preserving, he never extinguishes it!

You may see a friend in need — or the church you belong to.

- Don't rescue. Encourage that friend to find power to overcome.
- Get the facts. Assumption only leads to misunderstanding and does no one any good.

Make sure you know what is really going on. Get someone else to check, so that your feelings don't take control of your actions. Know what is really going on.

- Look for your friend's strengths in the situation. He might be good at working out what to do, or she might have reliable friends. These are both strengths.

And build on the strengths you find.

- Above all, aim that your friend's faith and love will grow more and more, because that is what strengthens anyone to be ready when the Lord Jesus comes. May that be true for us all and for all we love; in Jesus' name, AMEN