

Building A Church Of Thessalonica For The 21st Century | Part 2 | The Second Coming Of Jesus | Dr. Madana Kumar Series

Contributed by Dr. Madana Kumar, Phd on Jan 26, 2024

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5, Revelation 21:1-5, 1 Corinthians 15:24-26, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: In this part of the series Dr. Madana Kumar, looks into that hope and the anticipation that we can have because of the Second Coming of Jesus which was one of the reasons for the Thessalonian church to thrive.

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This is a part 2 of the series on 1& 2 Thessalonians.

In the first part , we looked at the historical background of formation of the Church at Thessalonica and explored several reasons why we should study these two epistles.

Just to recall some of the key highlights from Part 1. We have seen that the Thessalonian church flourished and stood as a model despite organised persecution. They thrived despite the physical absence of the founding leaders. They thrived among idol worshippers. They became an evangelistic church. "The Word of the Lord sounded forth" from this congregation. We are going to see how this small congregation glorified God and remained faithful.

My studies reveal that one of the main reasons why this church became a model church is because of the hope of the second coming of Jesus. The hope of His second coming affirmed the assurance of eternal life, it provided comfort in the face of grief, and it cemented their belief that all believers will be reunited with Jesus Christ when that happens. No wonder that the second coming of Jesus is referred to around 20 times in these two small epistles.

In today's lesson, we are going to focus on this main theme of these epistles, namely, the second coming of Jesus. It is important for us to understand this concept fully. Many of us have questions. We all know that the word became flesh and lived among us. We all know that Jesus took our sins and nailed them to the cross once for all and paid for our sins, past, present and future on the cross. We all know that Jesus defeated Satan when he gloriously rose on the third day and then ascended to heaven.

So it is right when questions arise on the prevalence of sin all around us today. Questions like, why does sin still exist all around us, not just exist but abound? Why is there pain and suffering if the price has already been paid? Why do the wicked go unpunished? Why do Christians get afflicted with terrible diseases like Cancer or Corona etc.? Many of us have questions.

The answer to many of those questions lies in the fact that we are living in an overlap phase of God's redemptive plan for humanity. The theological term for that is the mediatorial kingdom. But I won't burden you with the theological explanations. Let us look at it this way. When God created Adam and

Eve, there was no sin, but they had the freewill. Adam had the ability not to sin. So they were a situation what we could call as not-able-to-sin. But they chose otherwise, even though they had the ability not to sin. They chose to disobey God, sinned, and thereby corrupted the whole mankind. Because of their disobedience, humanity went into the second stage of the continuum that we could call as Total depravity, or to use the terminology in the language of sin, not-able-not-to-sin. Human beings lost the ability not to sin. That was the condition of humanity till Jesus's work of salvation on the cross. When Jesus took all our sins and died on the cross, God's grace became available to us, and we gained the ability to not sin. We came to the third stage of the continuum we can call as able-not-to-sin. God's grace working through faith in Jesus Christ enables believers to resist sin and live according to God's will. Paul reminds us through this letter about who we are. 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 says "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness". So we have the ability to stay away from darkness, from sin, but sin is still around. Sin did not go away from the world. The Kingdom of God has come, but the kingdom of sin exists as well. That is why we need Jesus to mediate or intercede between us and the Father. It is by his mediation that we receive grace now. So when will sin completely go away from our world? That is where the second coming is important. When Jesus comes again, sin will be completely eradicated, and a perfect kingdom will be established. Revelation 21:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 speak about the end of the overlap, the end of death, the end of suffering and pain and the final union of humans with God. That is something we all look forward to, isn't it? A world without sin, a world without pain, suffering and death. The establishment of God's true kingdom. Back to the Garden of Eden. That is the first hope that this letter brings to us. That the day will come when sin will be completely eradicated from the world.

I am excited about that day. I am hoping that the day will come soon. But the fact is that we do not know when that day will come. What can we learn about this day? What are the signs of this day? How should we prepare ourselves for the day? Let us see what Paul teaches the Thessalonian church about this.

When we study the text, we can come to the conclusion that Paul had taught them about Jesus's second coming already. Remember that we saw that Paul was there in Thessalonica for probably three to four weeks only. He says in this letter in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.". This clearly indicates that Paul had taught them about the second coming already. So, what was the need for Paul to write again about the same topic? There are several reasons.

1. Somehow the Thessalonian church had begun to believe that Jesus will come during their lifetime. Afterall, His ministry on earth just lasted for three years. So, his second coming should not take too long was their assumption. And then things started happening around them. Someone lost a grandpa; someone lost an uncle. The congregation members started worrying about the salvation of those who passed away.
2. There was confusion among them that the second coming might already have happened, and they did not know about it.
3. Worse still, several of the congregation members stopped working, stopped looking for business, thinking that the Lord will come and take them away, and so what is the purpose of working and

creating wealth and saving etc. They became lazy.

Paul addresses the first concern by giving the Thessalonians hope and reassurance. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. Paul is assuring the people that those who are dead have priority over those who are living when Jesus comes. They will rise again and be united with Jesus before the living get a chance. But in either case, dead or alive, we will always be with the Lord. Paul affirms this in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. That is the hope we have, that is the reassurance we have.

It is interesting to note that Paul uses the term "sleeping" when he refers to the dead. Those of you who know Leslie know that she does not know any Tamil. And you also know Amuda, who knows only Tamil and does not speak English. Over the past 27 years or so that Amuda has been with us, Leslie and Amuda have developed their own lingo to communicate. When Amuda says "Akka, shop ladka sleeping", what she means is not that the shopkeeper is sleeping on the job, but that the shopkeeper has died. I never knew that they were speaking biblical language till I started studying this passage. Anyway, back to Paul. Paul's use of the term sleeping is consistent with the belief that for those who believe, death is not permanent. There is an awakening and a resurrection. We sleep in Christ, we don't die. We sleep in Christ, so that when He comes again, we will wake up and be united with Him for ever. This is the hope for Christians. This is why death is not a fearful thing for Christians.

Three things we can remember from this passage.

1. Christians have a great encouragement in the face of death.
2. Death does not rob anyone of the blessings of the second coming.
3. That whether we are living or dead, when the second coming happens, we will be reunited with Him.

The second confusion that the Thessalonian church was the doubt that the second coming might already have happened, and they might have missed the bus. Paul assures them that this is not the case. He lays down certain events that must happen and the nature in which they should happen before the second coming of Jesus. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 says Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Here in this passage Paul is affirming that the Second coming of Jesus will not happen till two things happen.

1. There is a falling away from faith. Apostasy is the theological term for this. This refers to people in the church and not people outside the church. It refers to people who know Jesus, and not people who do not know Jesus. History shows that this falling away from faith has already started. The various cults like the Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists etc., are examples of this falling away from faith. More and more church members quitting church is a sign of this falling away from the faith. But has it happened fully? We do not know.

2. The second condition that Paul lays down before the second coming is the revealing of the "man of sin" as the NKJV puts it or "Man of Lawlessness" as many other translations put it. Paul says that the Lord will not come till the man of lawlessness is revealed. Paul talks more about the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,. So it is not as if lawlessness is not around us . it is already around us. But the man of lawlessness is not yet revealed. By the way, the man of lawlessness is not Satan because as Paul says here, the man of lawlessness is a work of Satan, not himself. Several theories had come and gone about who this could be in the historical sense, but none of them fit all the attributes of the man of lawlessness as Paul stipulates it here. Hence, we can safely assume that the man of lawlessness has not been revealed yet. It is a mystery, as Paul puts it, but it will be revealed at the right time. For those of you who are wondering what a mystery is, this story might help. A Catholic nun goes to a Catholic priest and asks, 'Father, what is the difference between a mystery and a miracle? The priest ponders over it for some time, and then says. "My dear sister, if you become pregnant, it is a mystery. If I become pregnant, it is a miracle." You get the point right. The mystery of the man of lawlessness will be revealed before the second coming of Jesus.

The third important thing that Paul assures the Thessalonian church is the fact that the second coming is not going to be quiet. We will know when it happens. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. 2 Thessalonians 7-8 states that the "Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire". Shouts, voice of the arch angel, trumpet of God. His second coming is not going to be a quiet affair, we will certainly know when it happens.

The third confusion that prompted Paul to write again about the second coming is the tendency of some Thessalonians to become lazy because of the second coming. We will pick this topic up as part of one of the next parts in this series.

So let us summarise today's learnings.

1. There is a second coming and that will put an end to sin in the world for ever.
2. We should have hope in the second coming, because it will unite us with Jesus for ever.
3. Those who are dead will not perish but will be united with him during the second coming, and hence we need not grieve the dead.
4. No, the second coming has not happened. There are signs of lawlessness around us, but the requirements have not been met yet.

5. We will know when the second coming happens.

6. We don't know the time of His second coming.

This should fill us with hope and anticipation. It fills me with hope and anticipation. In the next few parts of this series, we will investigate what we can do to prepare ourselves for this second coming.

Let us pray.