

Busy-ness

Herod Antipas has an issue. (Donald Trump has an issue.) He's not very popular. He says he is Jewish (Christian), but the faithful don't buy it. He claims he's just one of the locals, just like you. But then throws massive exclusive parties and goes off to foreign lands to rub elbows with the rich and famous. He says he is pious – and then breaks religious ethics.

Now there are grumblings, protests, and some are calling for rebellion. He needs to boost his authority by stamping his name on some things.

So he starts lots of building projects. When people see these grand projects, they'll say that is Herod's (Donald's) work. It is immortality caved in stone. He raises fees, taxes, (tariffs) to pay for all of these.

He even touches the set aside, special building - the temple - (the White House) and puts his touch all over it. He expands it, adds ornate decoration and massive gathering areas. It goes from a house of worship (- or democracy) to a place where anyone who is someone can be found - most of the building is dedicated to business and not the work it was originally constructed for.

Jesus is teaching in the massive public gathering spot of the temple. His disciples point out all the new additions and glittery things. They are impressed. Jesus tells them not to fall for the glam.

"All of this will be thrown down one day. Not a single stone will be left upon another."

Nothing Herod (Trump) touches will last. God's judgement is a world of justice, righteousness, and reversal: where the last become first, the low are lifted, the powerful are weakened, the ones who laugh now made to weep. A world of radical equality which is very good news for the oppressed and very bad news for the oppressors.

The disciples believe Jesus, and ask him, "When is this going to happen? What signs should we watch for?"

When will the world be about to change?

Jesus replies, "Beware you're not led astray. Many will come and say, 'I am Christian. Trust me!' or 'I am the chosen one!' They will say, 'The time is near, the end is nigh, this is the last days - follow me!' Do not go after them.

When you hear of wars and insurrections, don't be terrified. These things happen and are not signs of an imminent end. Nations will go to war against nations. Kingdoms will fight kingdoms. These things happen. It isn't the end of the world. Earthquakes, famines, plagues - these things happen. But these, too, are part of life and not signs the end is here. There will be terrible warnings and unlucky, dreadful signs, and the skies will be scary - but these happen too. Bad stuff just happens. It doesn't mean judgement day is here.

Before all of this occurs, before the chaos of the world, before God brings judgement to the world, before all is made right - before it all... something else is at hand, something else needs your attention.

You're going to be arrested and persecuted because of your faith. Because of me and my teachings. You're going to be attacked by your religious fellows and your country. You're going to be brought before kings and governors. This is your time to testify what you believe.

But don't fret about it. Don't plan out your words now. Make up your mind, be determined, to not prepare. Because when it happens, I will give you the words and wisdom. Your opponents won't be able to withstand or contradict what I give you.

It that doesn't mean you'll escape. You'll be betrayed - even by your parents, and siblings, your relatives, and friends. Some of you will be murdered by them. Everyone will hate you because you are associated with my name.

Yet not a hair of your head will forever perish. By your endurance, you will gain your souls."

And what is a soul worth? What would it mean to gain the whole world but lose one's soul?

So we wait. We live. We don't doomsday prep because Jesus told us to go about our lives. To intentionally, purposefully, choose to not prepare a defense. Instead, to endure. To love. To be community. And it doesn't mean nothing bad will happen. Actually, a lot of bad will happen! Earthquakes and wars, insurrections and famines - lots of bad. But all this bad isn't the end of life, the end of the world, the time of God.

Rather, Jesus is saying don't borrow concerns from tomorrow. There is more than enough for today. Today - today - endure. Persevere.

A generation or two later - and the temple is destroyed. There are new kings and new governors. New wars and new insurrections. New famines and plagues. A generation or two later, in Thessalonica, a group of Christ-followers are facing relatives who don't understand them. A city that thinks they are "sus," suspicious. And anytime something goes wrong - a lack of housing, a lack of food, a random illness - a scapegoat is sought and the Christians make good ones. Scapegoats, the people who get the blame, are often the politically weakest in society.

Immigrants. Minorities. Foreigners. Children. Women. Indigenous peoples.

The people who get the blame for taking all the jobs, all the houses, bringing all the diseases, all the violence - humans sure love to blame weaker humans instead of blaming more powerful humans, or systems. It's way easier to punch down than to speak truth to power. It's way easier to attack someone who looks or acts different than it is to rout out systemic injustice, racism, sexism, and inequality.

Christians are the minorities in Thessalonica. We have a section of the second letter to that church today. The second letter is very, very short. But its impact continues to echo because it has the words "those who would not work would not eat" or any version of that.

A phrase you may have heard in the news lately.

Why did Paul write this? It goes back to the prophecies of the end times.

In this letter, Paul praises them and reassures them God is taking note of those who are hurting them.

Then he addresses a rumor - "Look, I've never said that Judgement Day has come and gone. The Day of the Lord cannot come until the Man of Lawlessness has been revealed. You'll know him because he exalts himself over everything that is called god or worshipped. He'll say HE is God. Satan will support this lie with signs and wonders; people will believe the delusion. But those who delight in cruelty and wickedness will be condemned by God.

So hold fast and be firm in the faith!

On that note... For the love of God, love each other!

Look, we tried to set a good example for you. We worked when we were with you. We gave you the rule "the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." We've heard some of you have gotten idle and disruptive. You've not busy, but busybodies. (The Greek is some of you are "around working", and some of you are "working around" work.) Folks - stop causing a ruckus and do something productive! Never weary of doing what is good.

If someone won't stop making useless work, stop associating with them. Don't hate them, but warn them, and don't enable them.

Peace and God's grace - Paul"

Nowhere does Paul say "People with disabilities shouldn't be fed." Nor does he say, "Children and elderly need to be in factories if they want food."

Paul says - those unwilling, refusing, to work shall not eat. This isn't about one's ability, but one's desire. Plenty of people desire work but cannot find it, or cannot physically or mentally do it. Paul is writing against those who are able, and have work at hand, but are refusing.

I mean, if we think that this is the End of the World... would you go to work?

Paul then goes on telling people to not get tired of the work of “doing good.”

He hasn't been talking about the 9 to 5 at all! He is talking about those refusing to DO GOOD.

Those who are determined to do evil ought not be able to continue their evil off the labour of others.

Your taxes shouldn't be used to harm others.

Your politicians, paid by your labour, ought not cater to the rich and famous.

Those who do evil, and make work for the world - who disrupt and tear down - need to be called out, warned, and disassociated with.

Devest your funds from them.

Remove your pension from those companies.

Cancel your subscriptions when those companies support evil.

Shop local, trade with neighbours, build up each other and never weary of doing good.

You see, we get so busy with business. Busyness and business are the same word, pronounced differently only within the last hundred some years.

Busy-ness keeps me from local business. It is very easy to order online. Especially when I am busy! But many of the online companies have no interest in doing good. And many are taking labour, work, income, jobs, and money from local economies and concentrating them in the hands of those who are unwilling to work, refusing to do good.

Busy-work, busybody work, is work that doesn't add value. It makes work for work's sake. It can be meddling in other's affairs, or it can be refusing to help out and do good, or it can just be... busywork because we're busy.

How many times have you washed the laundry, got busy, and had to run the washer again because the clothes got mildewy?

How many times have you made a to-do list and never crossed a thing off?

Or, have you turned on the TV to catch the news, but then it is so overwhelming that you're emotionally drained for the rest of the evening?

Busyness is disruptive. Busyness makes us idle. Busyness is work that isn't life-giving. Paul is advising we stick to the work that is life-fulfilling, enriching, and builds up one another.

Busy-ness is making me feel overwhelmed. I cannot address the giant pains of the world. I cannot feed all the hungry. I cannot protect all the children, animals, nature from harm. I am weak. I make up work to make myself feel better. Things to distract me.

Jesus tells me to slow – I do not need to solve the world's problems. I need to only make up my mind that when I come across trouble, Jesus will be with me to address it. When I come across someone who is in pain – I can help them. That one person before me. When I am shopping I can pick up two cans instead of one and donate one can. I cannot feed millions. But I can feed one. I cannot protect all – but I can help those right here around me.

And that good work is contagious. It is a testimony. It is hope when things feel hopeless. It is love in a world aching for love. It is the presence of God. Do not weary, do not tire, of doing the little good you do in your quiet life. Indeed, it is such deeds that make the reign of God come at the unknown hour and day when we look around and realize – earth is how it is in heaven.

So breathe deep. Be determined to NOT prepare.

Don't give up and fill your life with meaningless busyness.

And just do the next right thing before you.

And all shall eventually be well. God is with you. Amen.



2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 NRSV

Warning against Idleness

⁶ Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister living irresponsibly and not according to the tradition that they^[a] received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not irresponsible when we were with you, ⁸ and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you. ⁹ This was not because we do not have that right but in order to give you an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: anyone unwilling to work should not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some of you are living irresponsibly, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

Luke 21: 5-19

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

⁵ When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."

Signs and Persecutions

⁷ They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" ⁸ And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them.

⁹ "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately." ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹ there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹² "But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, ¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls.

May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts.

