

Great Expectations

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[0 : 00] Starting at verse 13. Let's hear God's Word. And we also thank God continually because when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the Word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.

They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit.

The wrath of God has come upon them at last. Okay, Tom is going to come. Before he does, I'm going to pray for him. Well, no, he's going to come up. And before we listen to him, we're going to pray.

Yeah, so this is Tom, Tom Campbell, who's been around before. Nice to have you back, Tom. Nice to have you too, Grace. And as you pray for Tom, remember Alex, who will be preaching next week following on.

[1 : 27] So let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you so much again for the people that you gift and enable to understand your word and to teach it corporately like this.

We thank you, Father, for Tom. We thank you for the help that you have given him in this past week. And we pray afresh that you would pour out your spirit upon him and upon us, that we may hear the word of God, not as the word of men, but as it actually is.

The word of God that is at work among us. So we pray, work in us and change us and transform us to be the people and the church that you call us to be.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thanks. Good morning, everyone.

Now, I've been given a flicker, so if you're sleeping, I can zap you in the eyes. Okay. It's great to be back.

[2 : 46] So we're really happy to be here again and see lots of familiar faces. I'm just going to read the passage one more time, and then I'm going to pray and then get stuck in.

And we also thank God continually, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.

They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit.

The wrath of God has come upon them at last. Father, please help me now to speak your word, not my words. Help us to listen. Send your spirit so that we can learn about you now.

- [3 : 51] Amen. Okay, so just a quick update on what we're doing. We're living in Middleton still. Grace has finished her year studying to be a teacher, which she has finished, and she's now the best teacher.
- She got awesome results in her exams, which you can ask her about. She doesn't like when I say. I have now moved jobs. I am now working for Amazon from home.
- So the Amazon website, not the jungle. So I haven't been here in a while, but in our year of marriage, we've learned a lot.
- It's been a great year. We've really, really enjoyed it. So, yeah, we're doing really well. The title that I've given us today, Great Expectations, I guess with the idea that in life we all have expectations.
- We all have ideas of what life's going to be like, what we're going to be doing, where we'll end up. And I had great expectations for the Irish soccer team.
- [4 : 59] I was there with my Irish scarf and my Paddy Zela that Gracie bought me. Vuvuzela, except an Irish version. Two minutes in, 1-0 down.
- Against Croatia, it only took two minutes for my expectations to be dashed. So expectations don't always go as planned. And we can see here a group of people that we can learn a lot about, who may have had certain expectations.
- And people may ask, what will life be like as Christians? But we have the security to know that God tells us. So from these few verses, there's just a few points that I can take.
- The first one we can see in verse 13, that there's good news from God. And we also thank God continually because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.
- And that word of God is the gospel. These people in Thessalonica were told about Jesus. Told about the good news that Jesus died for them.
- [6 : 15] Because of the wrong that they'd done, Jesus had to die. So that good news that they could be with Jesus was told to them. That in verse 10 in chapter 1, we've already seen in earlier weeks, Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath.
- They were rescued. And that was the good news that they were told. And we can see that this message is from God. It's not a man-made story. It's real. And it's serious.
- Because it's from the creator of... Sorry. From the creator of the whole world sends us this good news. So this is why people stuck by it.
- Because they knew it was good news and it was from God. So would we choose to stick by something if we knew it was false? Would we stick by something in the midst of severe suffering if it wasn't real?
- So this is just a great proof that even though these people suffered, it was real. It was from God. They really believed it. So they received the gospel.
- [7 : 19] The next part, God's amazing strategy. We can see that even though it was Paul, Silas and Timothy, or as I might refer to them as Paul and Co, they told them the gospel.
- It wasn't God who audibly said it to them. It was men who said God's word to them. I think this is amazing that God uses people like us. He gave them a job to do to deliver his message.
- And I think that's a good illustration. It's like, back to Euro 2012. I won't get over it for a little while. It's like Trapatoni coming to Caragalline, coming to St. Mary's, picking some of the junior infants from St. Mary's to say, come with me, we're going to Poland and Ukraine.

We're going to beat the Spanish. So it's like somebody taking seemingly useless, incapable people to do a job.

And that's what God has done. It's his message, but he takes people who are seemingly useless to do his job. And we have that same mission. So it's an amazing responsibility.

[8 : 30] And just in 2 Corinthians, it sums this up well, that we're given this ministry of what's called reconciliation, bringing people back to God. So I'll just read it.

You don't have to look it up. From verse 18. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against him.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

So we are his ministers. We are to tell this amazing good news. And that's amazing that that's God's strategy. So, something that I was really challenged by when I was looking at these verses was the fact that God's word works.

So I'm just going to read the end of verse 13 again. The word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

[9 : 39] Human words have the power to change and affect the way we live. Right from when we were young, our teachers, we would change what we do because of what they say.

Our parents, our friends, peer pressure. So human words affect us. So how much more can God's word affect the way that we live? We take man's word and women's word, when we're married maybe, sometimes more seriously.

But how much more seriously should we take God's word? He's the creator of all things. We can see that God's word makes a visible difference in our own lives.

It actually changes us. It's at work. And that's an ongoing reality. I just want to flick quickly to Hebrews. Again, all these different references.

I'm just going to read them out. 4 and verse 12. For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

[10 : 44] It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. So God's word is living and active. It's not dead. It actually works and changes people. It's an ongoing reality.

But what I was really challenged with was that we need to put it there. So if we're not putting God's word there, it's not going to do anything. It can sit on our shelf. And from what I've heard, I've got an illustration.

When you're washing clothes, I think you need to use washing powder. Grace says something like that. When you put on a wash, you have to put in detergent. If you just stick the clothes in, no washing up powder, they're going to come out stinking.

Nothing's going to get clean. They're just going to be wet and smelly. Would just a small pinch of it work? No. You have to put in the right amount. And I thought that was a good example.

That if we're just even taking two minutes a day, one minute a day, quick, look at the Bible. Oh, I feel great now. It's not going to work. And that really challenged me.

[11 : 47] Because it is something that you have to put in the time to be changed by God's word. So next time you're doing a wash, you can think, have I put in enough Bible today?

And then finally, just in relation to this good news from God, is that we need to have faith. In verse 13, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

So God's good news is accepted by and at work in those who believe in Jesus. We must trust in the Lord. Trust in who he is, firstly, that he is who he says he is.

In what he's done. He sent Jesus to die for us. And what he says, his promises. What we can expect when we live for him. We need to have faith in God's message.

Just an easy way to think about that is just taking him at his word. Sometimes believing or trusting or having faith can be said so many times. But simply it's just taking him at his word.

[12 : 54] He'll do what he says. So we should believe him. And that applies for all of the promises in the Bible. Not just about how he'll save us, but everything. How he'll look after us, provide for us.

So we just need to trust in the Lord. Okay, so that's the first thing. There's good news from God. The next bit.

Suffering for his sake. So I'm just going to read the next couple of verses. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus.

You suffered from your own people the same thing those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. So we can see that the Thessalonians, the people here, became imitators of Paul and co.

and of the Lord. In chapter 1, verse 6, we already saw that. You became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 03] Excuse me. So they started out in suffering. Their lives as Christians started out in the midst of severe suffering. And then they became imitators of the church in Judea.

So as a people together, they were like the church in Judea who suffered from the Jews. And because of this, like we've heard in previous weeks, they became famous.

Because they were like the Jewish churches, they became famous. Their faith was known known all around that area. So what did the Jews do? They drove Paul and co.

out of Thessalonica. The Jews started a riot. They weren't happy with what was going on. The Jews had killed prophets and killed Jesus ultimately.

So this was serious suffering that was going on. So they started out suffering, but they also continued in suffering. Why? Because it was the truth and they were convinced of it.

[15 : 02] They stood by it. So they became imitators. So we must become imitators. So what does that mean? It might not seem very nice from what I've just said, imitating them.

But suffering is something that will be an effect if we are imitating. It's part and parcel of the Christian life. They go hand in hand, suffering for Jesus.

So there's kind of three things here now that I want to talk about in relation to suffering. Firstly, that we need to be different. Suffering with joy and then a reason so that others will notice.

So we need to be different from our society. As Christians, and the way we live, talk, think, we'll be different if we're living according to God's way.

And we'll suffer because of this. And that might vary in different ways. But because we're not living like everybody else, we will suffer.

[16 : 07] And I had a question, I had a thought, if we never suffer for our faith, if we never experience any sort of suffering, persecution, are we really different?

Are we really living according to God's way? And the slightly scary thing is that Jesus actually told us that we will suffer in John.

I'm just going to read from John 15, 18 to 20. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own.

As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you, a servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. So because we're following Jesus, he was persecuted, he was different, he said radical things, like Shane said, outrageous.

[17 : 08] Jesus said outrageous things and he suffered. We too are conveying what Jesus says and we too will suffer. But that suffering can be with joy, we can rejoice.

and this is something that is hard to get your head around. In chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians, verse 6, I already read it, that they accepted the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

Do you see that? The joy was given by God. It was given by the Holy Spirit. And now at times, I think it will need to be an active choice that we need to trust in the Lord.

So, just as an example, when we feel down or if we feel depressed because of bleak circumstances around us, and it always happens, we may not feel like rejoicing, we may not be happy at all.

Unemployment, illness, loss of a loved one, not knowing how we're going to pay the next bill. All these things are realities that bring us down, make us sad.

[18 : 19] But what gets us through is an active choice knowing that we can cling to our salvation by faith. There's nothing else we need to do. That's all we need. I think that's put well in 1 Peter.

I'm just going to flick to it quickly. I'm flicking around a lot. 1 Peter chapter 1. And it says, In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes, even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy Why? For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

So that's the root of our joy, our inexpressible and glorious joy when we're depressed and down. We can rejoice because that's all we need is salvation by faith.

[19 : 35] And finally, in this point, we need to be different, joyful suffering, and so the others will notice. Simply, as we suffer, people will see we're standing up for something so that others too will come to believe.

So, the next thing, how will we suffer? I was thinking more in maybe how this will get worked out, but firstly, I want to remind us that it's joyfully we will go through this.

Rejoicing. And there's different ways that we may suffer. Here in Ireland, we're in a very safe society. Yes, people might have their own opinions and views, so we might experience ridicule, exclusion from families or friends, laughing, verbal abuse, embarrassment, losing status in society, maybe even losing a job.

Maybe you stand up for something that you think is right and that results in there's no longer a job for you. Depending on where we are in the world, this could become physical.

Physical beating, imprisonment, perhaps even death. This is something that the Thessalonians were experiencing when they were together. Thankfully, we don't here today, but who knows where we'll end up.

[20 : 54] But even then, I think it's amazing in Acts. I can't remember the two of the disciples, but they were flogged for preaching the gospel.

And then when they left, when they were released, they counted it as joy because they were considered worthy of suffering. I think that's amazing. Can we count it as joy when we suffer?

Because when we suffer for Jesus, we know we're doing the right thing. And lastly, suffering for his sake, why will we suffer?

Like I said, because we're different. Our lives and actions and words will actually challenge people's motives, people's hearts, their world views, and people don't like this.

And again, depending on how extreme it will be, you might get a joke, you might get a laugh, you might get a, you might be excluded. But because we're challenging people's views, generally, people don't like this.

[21 : 57] So because we're different, we suffer because it actually strengthens us as believers. By standing firm through suffering, we grow. In James, chapter 1, it says, consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So God uses suffering to grow us, to be more like him. And another point, why we suffer, we actually validate God's message through suffering.

When we stand firm, we are declaring, I believe this is true, I think this is right, through suffering. And ultimately, it brings glory to God.

We're making him known. Why do we suffer? We're making God known in this world. If we're suffering, we have to stand up for what we believe in. And as I've said, we can do it joyfully, knowing that it's for God.

So that's suffering for his sake. And finally, the last point, is we can know that justice will be done.

[23 : 23] So I'm just going to read the last two verses from 15b. They displease God, and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.

In this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last. So this point, the idea that justice will be done, that wrath, God's wrath is coming.

And this made me think that suffering is made easier. In a tough situation, the idea of an athlete, the Olympics is coming up, the training that they go through, years and years of training, a doctor, the years that they go through to get qualified, it's really tough.

But when you think of the end goal, I'll make it, I'll get to the Olympics, I'll be a doctor. It makes the process more worthwhile. So for us, looking to our ultimate goal, like we've mentioned, the salvation of our souls, makes suffering easier.

We can know that, from these verses, that God will do what's right. He will bring justice to the world. So if we suffer injustice or persecution at the hands of people, we don't need to get our own back.

[24 : 52] God will sort it out. So then, something I was reading the other day with grace is in Hebrews 10 and verse 30. For we know him who said, it is mine to avenge, I will repay.

And again, the Lord will judge his people. So God is the one who will sort it out. We don't need to worry. So if we suffer at the hands of people, we need to leave justice to him. We don't need to worry.

And that takes a huge weight off our shoulders. We don't need to get our own back. I'm an awful one for hating injustice. I hated cheating when I was at camps. Couldn't stand it. But when there's injustice in the world, in our own lives, we can relax knowing God will sort it out.

From these verses, we can see that God's wrath is coming. Wrath isn't really a word that's often used. So what is it? It's God's righteous anger against sin.

It's his anger that is right. It should be there against sin. There is an unstoppable force coming.

[26 : 06] God isn't happy with sin. He's not happy with injustice. We watched a film recently called Unstoppable. It's not great. So if I ruin it, don't worry.

It's about a train that starts rolling and they can't stop it. And the whole film is about this train that is unstoppable. And I guess it made me think of this, that this unstoppable force, God's wrath, there's nothing to stop it.

There was images in the film where there were cars, caravans parked on the train lines and the train just plowed through them. There was nothing to stop it.

They did stop the train in the end. But there is no stopping God's justice. There's no stopping God's wrath. It is coming. And I think the phrase here, the way Paul says it, the wrath of God has come upon them at last.

My initial thought was that, right, this is so certain, he's actually said it in the past tense. The wrath of God has come upon them at last. Whereas he, God's wrath is still to come.

[27 : 18] This actual verse is a bit of an area of debate. Possibly that the wrath has already begun to be fulfilled. Some people point to different actual events in history as being God's wrath as pointed to from these verses.

But one thing is certain and we can think about those things later, that God's wrath is coming. There will be a point when everyone will face the Lord. And God's mercy won't extend forever to those who don't trust Jesus.

We know that we are safe when we trust in Jesus. But God, like it says in the Old Testament, in Exodus, chapter 34, he won't let the guilty go unpunished.

And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of their parents to the third and fourth generation.

[28 : 30] So God is not a God who stands by idly. Justice will be done. So this idea that God's wrath is coming, there's great news, but there's sad news with this point.

The great news is from chapter 1 in verse 10, we've been rescued. Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Wrath is coming, but we're safe if we trust. We have the joy of knowing that we have a never-ending future to be spent with Jesus in a perfect world.

So even though this wrath is coming, we're safe. He's rescued us. But the sad news is that some people aren't safe, those who don't trust in Jesus.

They will have to face up to that unstoppable force that is coming, that is God's wrath, his anger. So our job is to tell people the great news that we have so that others won't have to face that.

[29 : 38] So in thinking about great expectations, we may have expectations for our lives as Christians, for our lives in what we might do in business with our friends, for those who may be Christians a shorter time.

Maybe we thought it was going to be all hunky-dory. But let me tell you, we may have great expectations, but in fact there's a greater reality that we are living for God and we have an eternity to spend with him.

And even in the midst of suffering we can have joy. so I just want to leave a challenge. Are you safe? Is your trust in Jesus, in his life, death, and resurrection?

If it is, then yes, you're safe. But if not, then you may be in danger of God's anger for not living as he wants you to.

So like I said, great expectations for our lives, but the truth is it's better than we can imagine because we're living for God and we get to be with him.

[30 : 49] Okay, so let's pray. Amen. Father, thank you that you give us your word.

It's not a human message. It's from you, the creator of the heavens and the earth. You speak to us and ultimately that message of salvation.

Thank you for that. Thank you for that good news that you've given to us. Lord, please help us to be people who allow your word to work in our lives.

help us not to neglect it and Lord, we're sorry for when we do. Father, I pray that you would help us to face the reality of suffering in this life with joy.

Please give us that joy when it's not natural. We know it's from you and we know that you give it. Please help us through those times where it isn't natural.

[32 : 03] Help us to stand firm for you no matter what we may face. Thank you that justice will be done. We don't need to worry. Help us to be prepared for when that comes.

Thank you for how we are safe when we trust in you. Help us to tell others how they can be safe too. Thank you Lord for the wonderful reality that we have in store, the wonderful future.

Help us to cling to that knowing that's all we need no matter what's going on. Thank you for helping me. Please help us to live as you want us to today.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing in response Be Thou My Vision O Lord of My Heart I guess there's a continuation on our prayer that the Lord would be our vision for our life and for how we should live.

Let's stand together as we sing.