

Persevere in Truth

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[0:00] Do you always fall for a tall story? Do you get swept away by a good Aussie yarn? My Uncle Lee, he thinks I'm gullible. He is the last great Aussie yarn spinner.

He never lets the truth get in the way of a good story. His last yarn was his best. At Christmas time, he told me that when he was in the war in Vietnam, he jumped out of a helicopter, landed in enemy territory, and was shot 39 times in the legs.

But Uncle Lee hasn't got a scratch on his legs, and he doesn't have a Purple Heart medallion on his mantelpiece. And Uncle Lee doesn't know that I know that when he was in Vietnam, he was a storeman and not actually in combat.

He is a proper yarn spinner. And my whole life, he's told me all these sort of tall stories, and they drive my dad over there. They drive my dad crazy.

But really, there's no harm. Because if they're not true, they're only Aussie yarns, aren't they? So it's all good. But you see, if I can change direction for a moment, lies are different.

[1:13] Lies aren't harmless. They have a devastating effect on people. So at the international level, there are politicians breaking election promises.

There is mass fraud. There is international cover-ups. Closer to home, what about when teenagers start lying to mum and dad?

Or mum and dad start lying to each other? Lies are dangerous. Now, just to prove that I am not lying, our passage is all about lies.

And have a look at the lying type repetition. So have a look in your Bibles. Chapter 2, verse 2. I'm just going to do a whistle-stop tour here. Verse 2, teaching allegedly from us.

Verse 3, don't let anyone deceive you in any way. Verse 9, it's in accordance with how Satan works. He's the father of lies. Again, in verse 9, signs and wonders that serve the lie.

[2:16] Verse 10, wickedness deceives. Verse 10 again, they perish because they refuse to love the truth. Verse 11, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe what is false.

Verse 12, all those who have not believed the truth. Nine times in 12 verses, you have the language of lying. It's repeated. Lies were going around the Thessalonian community.

People were claiming to have an authoritative word from the Apostle Paul. The word was that Jesus had already returned. And I put that lie at the top of your handouts.

You should have a handout there. That lie is at the top of your handouts. Paul says in verse 1, chapter 2, verse 1, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us, whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter, asserting that the day of the Lord had already come.

Now, if you weren't here last week, we started looking at this small Thessalonian church. They were one of the earliest churches in the Roman province of Macedonia. Everyone in that city followed the Roman king Caesar.

[3 : 37] But this tiny little church follows the heavenly king Jesus. This led to violent persecutions by everyone around them.

But rather than denounce Jesus and save themselves the pain, the Thessalonians kept on publicly affirming their faith. You see, they knew that one day the Lord Jesus would return and liberate them and judge his enemies.

We talked about that last week. This future day of Christ kept motivating them to persevere through suffering. Now, there was a lie sweeping through their community that Jesus had already returned.

And we're going to see that far from being a mere Aussie yarn, this lie had a devastating effect on their faith. Like the Thessalonians, we too are in the same phase of salvation history.

That is, we too are waiting for verse 1. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him. Like the Thessalonians, we too are persevering for him in a city that hates him.

[4 : 50] Like the Thessalonians, we too are potentially, if those elbows are any indication, are potentially just as gullible as they are. We're just as susceptible to believe lies that can unsettle their faith.

Our faith, sorry. And so we need to listen to this extremely important chapter of the Bible. And so my aim today is that we would understand the times we are living in and see how dangerous lies can unsettle our faith.

I'm going to say that again. My aim is that we would understand the times we're living in and see how dangerous lies can unsettle our faith. So please keep your Bibles open.

That would really help me. The handout's there with some points to tell you where I'm going. Let's go through point one. I want you to imagine that some magic device turns this 1030 congregation here at HTD into a small little Thessalonian house church 2,000 years ago.

And some stranger walks in the back door there and he stands up and says, Everyone, everyone, last night I had a really spicy curry and then I went to sleep and of course I had a really strange dream.

[6 : 03] And in the dream, the Apostle Paul gave me a prophecy. He said that the Lord Jesus had already come. Don't know about that. Maybe more realistically, a stranger walks in the back door and says, Hey, listen, the Apostle Paul wrote me my own letter and the word on the street is, The Lord Jesus had already come.

And if you were Thessalonian, this was a massive problem because what does this lie say about their daily Christian experience? If Jesus had already come, why are we still being persecuted?

Wasn't he supposed to liberate us from our enemies? If Jesus had already come, does the fact that I'm still being persecuted mean I'm actually suffering judgment?

I'm actually one of God's enemies? You can see how a lie like this would unsettle their faith. You can see how easily it would stop them persevering for that true day of the Lord.

Last week we used the illustration of the marathon runner Andy and we said that Andy was persevering through the pain of the marathon for that future finish line.

[7 : 19] Now I want you to imagine that as Andy's running away through the pain, someone runs alongside him and says, Andy, Andy, listen, the athletic stewards have just given me a word and said, you actually passed the finish line five miles ago.

Now, poor old Andy, that would be confusing to say the least. But can you imagine the effect that would have on his perseverance? How tempting would it be for him to stop running, to stop persevering for that true finish line that is still ahead?

And people down through the ages have always been obsessed with Jesus' return, claiming that it's already happened or will happen right now. If you want some fun, go on the internet.

There are literally dozens of predictions about Jesus' return. So firstly, the Jehovah's Witness, they claim that Jesus already returned in 1914, secretly, I might add.

There's a pastor called, his name is Mark Blitz. He said that in September 2015, Jesus returned. That was a couple of years ago. Clearly that's a lie.

[8 : 28] My favourite one is Harold Camping. Good old Harold, he's had quite a few cracks at it throughout history. If you don't succeed at first, try and try again. The law of averages is on old Harold's side.

Now, I'm a bit disappointed because one of Harold's goes was September 1994. Now, that was one month before my VC exam, so if Harold was right, it would have saved me a lot of pain.

So I'm a bit... Thanks, Harold, very much. Thanks for nothing. Now, here's the thing. Here at HTD, we can easily dismiss these people and the things on the internet as nutters.

Because no amount of biblical gymnastics would be able to convince you that Jesus has already returned. So I think the dangerous lie for us, for this congregation, is not Jesus has already returned, but that Jesus is never returning.

I printed that lie at the top of your handout as well. Jesus has already returned. Jesus is never returning. They're the lies. What does Paul say?

[9 : 33] He says, No. Don't be gullible. It's a lie. Verse 3. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. And you'd expect the verse to finish there.

Don't be deceived. It's a lie. Full stop. But actually, Paul clarifies the facts of Jesus' return by referencing another man's return.

This mysterious man of lawlessness lawlessness that we heard about. Verse 3. For that day, that is the day of the Lord, will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

Last week, we said Jesus' return would be an unmissable event. The man of lawless arrival will also be seen by everyone. Verse 4. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God so that he sets himself up in the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God.

In some of these verses there, verse 3, it talks about rebellion being his main ministry. The word rebellion is also the same as the word apostasy. That means when believers fall away from their God.

[10 : 47] The man of lawlessness is singularly focused on causing Christians to fall away from Jesus. I think that makes sense of why in verse 4 he makes himself out to be God in so many ways.

Paul says in verse 6, and now you know what is holding him back so that he may be revealed at the proper time. Something is restraining this man, says Paul.

He has his own appointed time. Jesus has already returned? No, says Paul. Don't be gullible. Don't be deceived.

That day won't happen until the man of lawlessness is revealed first. And so, if the man of lawlessness has to come before Jesus comes, let's have a little bit of a look at this man of lawlessness.

This is point 2 on your handouts. In the 1990s, my mum bought these sermon tapes from a church in America and this church in America claimed that the man of lawlessness was actually Henry Kissinger.

[11:56] Henry Kissinger was a political operative of the 60s and 70s. And down through the ages, Christians have always tried to figure out who this man of lawlessness is. I guess just as we're trying to do right now.

The early reformers thought he was the Pope. Earlier in the 20th century, they thought he was Hitler. And I guess today, people might try and pin it on Trump or Putin.

If you're anything like a guy that I study with at Ridley College, you'll think he's Daniel Andrews, the state premier. I'm not sure about that. That's a bit political for me. But the truth is, no one actually knows who he is.

There are theories that he's not actually a man, but more like a force of lawlessness, maybe a state of lawlessness. For what it's worth, I think he's actually a man, actually a person.

The reason why, he seems to be personified in these passages repeatedly. But more importantly is the way Paul sets him up in opposition to another man, Jesus Christ.

[13:00] So just quickly, Christ is coming, verse 1, the man of lawlessness is coming, verse 9. Christ revealed, verse 7, the man of lawlessness revealed, verses 3, 6, and 8.

Christ is the agent of God. Man of lawlessness is the agent of Satan, verse 9. Christ does mighty signs and wonders for people's salvation. Man of lawlessness does signs and wonders for people's deception and ruin, verse 9 and 10.

He is, if you like, the opposite man, an antithesis to Christ, an anti-Christ. Christ. But the tricky bit about this man of lawlessness comes from the timing in verse 7.

Paul says that the secret power of lawlessness is already at work. Tricky because while this passage says he's a future man, verse 7 says his power is already at work.

Future man with the present work. I think that's another way he mimics Jesus, our man, future man with a present work in our lives.

[14:11] And the reason he can be in two time zones at once, I think, is because he is an agent of Satan. The Bible calls Satan the father of lies.

So there's a definite theme here today. You see, Satan has always been presently at work. Think back to the Garden of Eden, the very first act of lawlessness.

Satan lies to Adam. What does he say? Did God really say you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree? Then again he says, you will not surely die.

In other words, you will not be judged. That lie is so similar to the Thessalonian lie. Jesus has already returned. Jesus will never return.

It's the second oldest lie in the book. There's no judgment. Our Ezekiel passage we had in the first reading, that spoke about false prophecies and lies going on in the time of ancient Israel as well.

[15:16] The fact that there were lies presently unsettling the Thessalonian church showed that he was active then as well. And in 2017, I think lawless lies are just as active as Satan is.

And so for us, the lie at work in this city is Jesus is never returning. What would the effect of this lie be on your faith?

Last week we talked about how future knowledge affects present circumstances. And you see, I would never admit to you publicly that I don't believe Jesus will never return.

But sometimes I show that I believe this lie by the way I live my life, by the way I prioritize the things of my life. This bit is really important.

When we live as if Jesus' future return is never happening, all sorts of other future goals rush in. I'm going to say that again. When we live as if Jesus' future return is never happening, all sorts of other future goals rush in.

[16:28] So, Rachel, my wife over there, Rachel and I are hoping to buy a house one day. My future goal is a decent house with an incredible backyard.

I love land, I don't know why, I really want to have some chickens, I don't even eat eggs, so you figure that one out. I really want that, that's one of my future goals.

My other future goal is a shiny new car every five years. I'd love to churn over a car, I'm still driving the same car I had when I was 18, it's the worst car in the car park, I promise you. The things that spurred up windows, water doesn't work.

my future goal is to live healthily until I'm at least say 80, that would be a good innings, I think. I also think about the future for my son, as many of you think about the future for your children and your family.

I think about his future schooling, his future career. What will house prices be like one day if he ever gets the opportunity to buy them? I think about his future marriage, God willing, Glenn and Naomi, you have fine daughters.

[17:39] Let's keep the conversation going. But can't you see how elegant and dangerous this lie is?

You see, all these things are good and important things. Jesus returns, seems like it will never happen, at least not for ages anyway.

we can't see any evidence of it. And what that does, that lie elevates good, important things into ultimate things, into more urgent things.

It is a brilliant, brilliant lie. You see, but in light of Jesus' return, are these things the future goals I should have?

are these future goals I should prioritise my whole life around, my son's life around? That is what this city, presently under the work of lawlessness, is selling me, selling you.

[18:46] What are the future goals rush in when we live as if Jesus' return is never happening? I put that question at the bottom of your handout. I'd love that to fuel your prayers this week.

And so, in light of Jesus' future return, which is definitely happening, Paul presents for us two futures to choose from, a grim one or a glorious one.

And this is our final point, choose your future. Let's first look at the bad one. So, halfway through verse 10, Paul says, they perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved.

For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie. So, if you refuse to love the truth, you won't be saved.

That's what verse 10 says. Perishing is the language. And for this reason, verse 11, God punishes them. He sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie to hold them in their hatred of the truth.

[20:01] And all of that leads to verse 12, a grim future, so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

If you're not a Christian here today, we in this church are desperate for you not to have this grim future. please consider this church part of God's attempts to get you to love the truth.

That is, love the gospel and love the Bible. And if you do love the gospel and love the Bible and you do want to choose a glorious future for yourself along with the rest of us, you should know that you and we are not alone.

So we've talked a lot about lawlessness being at work and with the stakes being as high as they are, it sounds like it's all on us. Lies are everywhere.

But actually in verse 13 to 14 we'll see the work of God. So I'm going to read verse 13 and 14 and I want to read it with emphasis so you will hear God at work.

[21 : 14] But we ought always to thank God for you brothers and sisters loved by the Lord because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel so that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We go again in verse 16 and 17 listen to God's work.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father gave us eternal encouragement and good hope. Verse 17 they encourage our hearts and strengthen us.

If you want a glorious future God is working for us. Father, Son and Spirit. And the reason why is given repeatedly in verse 13 and verse 16.

Because he loves us. God is in the words of Gandalf to Frodo. Now that is an encouraging thought. Yes, lawlessness is presently at work.

[22 : 27] But God is also working. Because he loves us. Because he chose us. Because he sanctifies us. So we will have a glorious future with the Lord Jesus.

And if you have any sense, you will want this future for yourself. And if that is you, your bit, our bit, is sandwiched right in the middle of God working in verse 15.

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. What a cracking memory verse that is.

The word teachings here, they're most likely referred to the Jewish scriptures. And Paul's own testimony in letters about Jesus for us.

That is the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is the Bible. If you want a glorious future, stand firm in this dusty old Bible. That's what Paul is saying.

[23 : 30] Don't be deceived by the lawless lies of this city. Cling to your only source of truth. Through it, God will secure a glorious future for you.

Last week we talked about perseverance. This week it's standing firm. And they're not unrelated things. They're actually very similar. Last week persevering by trusting in Jesus' return.

This week standing firm by trusting in Jesus' word. They're very, very similar. If you're a Harry Potter fan here, clearly this is your defence against the dark arts, isn't it?

And what I want to do, just to finish, I want to be really practical. And so what I want to do is look at three lies which are alive and well in this city, and I want to look at ways we stand firm in the truth against them.

So can I have the first slide please? First slide. So the three lies I'm going to show you all revolve around Jesus' return.

[24 : 39] So here's the lie. Jesus is never returning or not for ages. Plan your own future, eat, drink, be merry, repent on your deathbed. That lie is available for you in Melbourne, free of charge.

And what is the truth you need to stand firm in? Look at Acts 17, 31. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

Jesus is returning. That is the truth. His resurrection is the evidence. That is the truth. Next lie please. Next lie. Lie number two.

I'm already forgiven by Jesus, therefore I can live any way I want now. After all, God is 90% love and only 10% judgment. That lie is available for you in Melbourne today.

What is the truth you need to stand firm in? What about this from Romans 2, 3, 4? This one's a bit more harsh, but anyway, it's truth. Do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

[25 : 48] Don't show contempt for God's kindness and character. Our godly living matters enormously. And here is the final lie that we'll look at today.

If Jesus returns, what makes you think he would want you? Jesus wants the very best, like the person in the front row. Good work, Philip. Brilliant.

Philip, the lie is Philip is saved and we're all in trouble, but Philip, you're still saved in both, don't worry. What is the truth you need to stand firm in?

What about this from Mark 2? I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. See, Jesus doesn't want people. He wants people who know they're sinners.

You see, all thank you for the slides, that's enough. And what I could have done, I could have gone through a million lies, not all related to Jesus return, but a million other lies that are available for you in Melbourne, and I could go through in lie after lie how this truth will stand you against them.

[26 : 58] You see, all lies are bad, but some lies are deadly dangerous if we're gullible enough. Given that our times are deceptive, given that our apostasy and future salvation is at stake, it ramps up the importance of times when we hear the Bible read, the Bible taught, when we listen.

Think of your morning quiet times, your midweek Bible studies, this sermon. without realizing this past 25 minutes, you have been standing firm.

That is what sermons are. Contrary to popular belief, they're not actually drift off to sleep times. From this vantage point, I can see a few of you have, trust me. I'll be talking to you afterwards.

But sermon times are times where we humbly admit our susceptibility to gullibility. Sermon times are where we address our weaknesses.

You see, I, we, are so easily deceived by the lies of this city. Their promises seem so appealing, so urgent.

[28 : 15] We want a glorious future now, a sweet and prosperous life here. we want that for our children as well. These future goals make us dismiss the seriousness of Jesus' return.

They underplay his cosmic glory in place of our own glory. Paul says don't be deceived. Don't be gullible. It is a lie. Stand firm.

Hold fast to the truth. I'm going to pray as we look at verses 16 and 17. I'm going to pray verses 16 and 17. Father, we confess our gullibility and the ease with which we can get swept away by the lies of this city.

Help us stand firm against lawless lies. Help us hold fast to your word. And may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage our hearts and strengthen us in every good deed and word.

We ask it for his glory. Amen.