

**Big Idea: God is a true and living God who rescues us through Jesus which is life changing.**

**Big Issue: We can judge God and his goodness by our circumstances rather than by his Son. Which makes us wait impatiently rather than hopefully.**

We can all ask ‘What happened?’

Perhaps that job offer looked good on paper but the reality is office politics and turmoil. That cute and wonderful baby is now a teen stranger in your house. Or maybe the promise hasn’t turned into disaster but rather has become monotony and boredom. Moving house or getting married. The exciting promise went wrong or fell flat.

What Happened is also a Hillary Clinton book about losing the 2016 American Presidential election. We would all like to know. Whatever you think about the result – it was a topsy-turvy, completely unexpected campaign.

**Link:** Acts 17. Paul, Silus and Timothy come into Thessalonika and as usual in a new town they find themselves a place to sleep, a job to earn a few denarii and each Shabbat they head to the synagogue to explain how Jesus is the messiah that the scriptures describe. Within 3 weeks there are Jewish, and Greek people who agree. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. And there are those who don’t like it. They find a rent-a-mob and start a violent protest which becomes a riot. Paul and his friends escape but the

locals who had become Christ-followers end up on the wrong end of a violent mob and the city courts.

Paul has to keep ahead of the trouble and keep travelling, it isn't until a while later that he hears from the Thessalonians and then he writes this letter to them. Its his 'What Happened'. But its not an apology, or a defence. He explains more of what it means to trust and follow Jesus, as well as why its so hard, and how even a riot isn't bad news.

Whether or not you can pinpoint the exact moment you became a Christian I'm going to bet it wasn't after 3 weeks with an angry mob and asbo at the end of it.

What Happened? – Paul says three great things happened.

### **1) The Thessalonians turned to the living and true God (v8-10)**

Firstly the Thessalonians turned to the living and true God  
*<sup>8</sup>For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. <sup>9</sup>For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.*

Its such a transformation that it was the gossip of the year.

Some things are obvious.

I'm not very good at spotting things – my wife had new lampshades on all the lamps for a week before I noticed. Even then she had to tell me. I'm not good at spotting the obvious but even I would have noticed the Thessalonian Christians – because everybody had. It was obvious.

*<sup>8</sup> For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. <sup>9</sup> For the people of those regions report to us...*

A Riot in a Roman controlled city should have been top news. Thessalonian politics and safety should have been on everyone's lips.

But actually the Bible tells us that it wasn't the riot but the cause of the riot – the fact that people had put their trust in Jesus v8 – 'Word of the Lord' that sounds forth. And its their' faith in God' that has become known. People in the region meet Paul and they tell him about the Thessalonian's faith.

The Headline isn't 'City Riot – danger on the streets' its 'People turn to God' This news has gone viral.

Look at the end of v9 *how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,*

What amazes people is that they turned from idols. Regular temple worship that everyone did. Normal stuff – everyone knew was right and respectable.

But this was different.

They had turned to serve a Living and true God.

That is a God who is true - real. Not a version of humanity blown up to super-impressive size.

A true God. Maker of all things.

Who is living and relational.

Not a tick box exercise on worship and offerings. Not an idea of God passed down to you from your parents. God.

The living God.

The Thessalonians turned to the living and true God

**Application Question:** This morning who do we worship? How big is the God you know? Is he a tick list? An idea? A spiritual security blanket? A Sunday experience? I've treated Him in all those ways at times in my life. But God has been patient and gracious to show himself to me in the pages of the Bible so that I know the living and true God today. He's brilliant. You'll know if you know him – its unmistakable. He will want to make you turn from idols.

## 2) The Thessalonians trusted a risen Rescuer

The second thing that God tells us in Paul's letter is that the Thessalonians trusted a Risen Rescuer

Because the way that they had come to know this God was through Jesus – God's Son who died and rose again.

*Verse 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.*

By trusting that Jesus had suffered on the Cross and risen to life again they had come to know this living and true God.

I did an engineering degree once upon a time. I teach maths in my school. Films with bad physics really irritate me. As my family will tell you I am an avowed geek so they don't let me speak during star wars films.

And I know that dead people don't rise back to life three days after they die. Scientifically impossible.

That is as daft to me as it would have been to the people of that time. But these Christians, like I do now, believed that this Jesus was the Son of God who could lay his life down and pick it up again.

Jesus – because he was fully God and fully human could offer to take on himself all the wrong of my life and my heart.

All the ways that I had wronged and turned away from the Holy God of the universe. And he could pay the price for them on the cross.

A Good God can't leave crime unpunished or wrongs not put right. He promises that he has a day when Justice will be done – for everyone, for all time and for every way in which we wrong him. There is no wrong that is not personal to God.

When I lie to someone I am not just wronging them – I am also trying to sell them a re-written world. That I write. I make myself the author of the world. It denies the world that God has made as well as the maker of it.

I become the maker of the world – I replace God with me.

Greed: Daydreaming/being envious about those clothes, that car, that person (real or fantasy). Is really saying – “God. You didn't get it right. I deserve more than I have. I deserve better than I have. You aren't a good, loving, God. I could do it better.” In my heart – I replace God as the wise maker of the world.

The term for this is sin. Sin is personal to God because goodness comes from him. All wrongdoing or wrong thinking can be traced back to wanting to replace God or sideline him. Why is Sin such a big deal – because it is always a rejection of the God who made and sustains us.

Which is why God's justice is sometimes called his wrath. As it is at the end of v10. Its not God throwing a tantrum. Nor is it him being malicious. It is his settled, thoughtful anger at all injustice on people and rebellion against him.

What a loving God to put that kind of Justice on his own Son.

Australian: (California) Bush Fires. If a fire is coming then the only way to avoid it is to back burn a patch of earth and stand in it. When the fire roars through it can't burn the ground around you because its already been burnt.

That's what was being talked about. Jesus has taken on God's just anger for everyone who puts their life in his hands so that when God's justice arrives at the end of history we can be safe.

<sup>10.</sup> ...to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

The Thessalonians were trusting Jesus, raised from the dead, to take on their sin so that they could live in love with God rather than face the anger they deserved.

The Thessalonians trusted a risen Rescuer

**Application Question:**

The Cross, the resurrection, the Day of Judgement are all ridiculous. Unless they are true.

In which case they are not just amazing but also important and urgent things to think about and get sorted with God.

### 3) The Thessalonians found themselves in the Middle of God's purposes

Lastly The Thessalonians found themselves in the Middle of God's purposes

They – like all Christians find themselves in the middle. We like an American TV show in our house called 'The Middle'. Set in middle America with a middling family. The middle is the middle of nowhere special. Average and mudane in everyway.

But for Christians the middle is an exciting place to be. Its between the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the final day of Justice.

*how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,<sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.*

The news is that the Thessalonians are waiting. They don't have it all now. This Jesus business is not about have the best possible life now. Its about living with this God now – this side of the cross. But its about looking forward to the other side of history – where no more injustice can occur.

That's not waiting like you wait in the doctor's surgery. It's a frustrating period of time – taste of God's forgiveness and love, but not the full experience of it yet.

Paul's letter says that he can see that they are waiting well – because they are busy.

III: Who you would personally love to have come for dinner at your house? A Personal hero or famous person. Imagine that news comes of their arrival. Invitation accepted! A relationship has been established. What a great day. Is that it? No!

Day of their arrival is in the future, its coming. You have to wait for it. But do you wait by doing nothing? No! Get food in. Think about what to cook. Clean. Get the house ready – announce – “No one use the downstairs bathroom – its clean”.

Look how the Thessalonians wait in v2-3

*<sup>2</sup>We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly <sup>3</sup>remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Their faith in Jesus, their love of God and their hope of all God has promised leads to work, labour and steadfast endurance.

Everyone can see it. Paul hears about it from miles away. It trends on 1<sup>st</sup> century Twitter. They are waiting well.

Challenge to us: I won't wait well if I think that the invitation isn't there. No cross/no resurrection. I won't waiting well if I think there is no day ahead. No return of Jesus. I'll just get on and do what is good for me. And those I love – for now.

But if I know God through Jesus and I accept his promise of rescue then I live in the middle of the two earth shattering moments in all of history. And I can't wait – and do nothing.

How much of our Christian life is habit/upbringing/social expectation?

How much is driven by seeing that Jesus return is ahead of me and his resurrection is behind me?

Is this the week between the 22<sup>nd</sup> October and the 29<sup>th</sup> of October?

Or is it between the two great moments of Justice and Grace of the Living and True God?

*From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*

<sup>2</sup> *We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly* <sup>3</sup> *remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>4</sup> *For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you,* <sup>5</sup> *because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake.* <sup>6</sup> *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit,* <sup>7</sup> *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.* <sup>8</sup> *For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.* <sup>9</sup> *For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,* <sup>10</sup> *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.*

## **Acts 17**

<sup>2</sup> *And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures,* <sup>3</sup> *explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.’*