

1. Power to Persist

Art History Lesson 101: Vasily Kandinsky, born in Russia, 1866. He was one of the founders of the abstract art movement (bowl of fruit paintings were not his thing!) He's also famous for painting on both sides of the one canvas. Sometimes the contrast between the two sides was striking. On one side - dark and ominous. On the flip side - all bright and cheerful!



The letter known as 2 Thessalonians is sort of like a Kandinsky picture. On the one hand you have strange words about the future - *'For that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction'* (2:3), and then you also have the everyday and mundane - *'Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat'* (3:12). As we'll see, the future is absolutely related to the present. As Christian people we need to have a proper vision of the future, for living now.

a) Have a read of 2 Thessalonians. As you read, try to identify what are the 'threats' that the Christians in Thessalonica are facing? After you have a read, share what you came up with?

b) Paul (on behalf of Silus and Timothy) writes this letter not simply to say 'hello' but to help his Christian friends in Thessalonica. What is the threat in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. (If you want to get some background, check out Acts 17:1-13).

God at work in the Present

c) After the greeting of verse 1, how would you say Paul starts his letter (v3-4)?

d) Is there a difference between thanking and boasting? Is this sort of boasting wrong? Paul seems to make a habit of this sort of boasting (See 1 Thessalonians 2:19).

e) In this thanksgiving section, what are the things that Paul has identified that God has been doing in these people's lives?

God at work in the Future

f) Verses 5-10 is all about what God will do in the future. Here we have a picture of what will happen when Jesus returns to judge the world. These are not easy words to digest. How would you summarise these verses in a couple of sentences?

g) How do you respond to the hard things said in this passage?

This is undoubtedly a hard passage. It can assault our emotions. But in thinking about this, we would do well to not think of God as some crazed madman indiscriminately venting his fury upon the innocent. God will exercise his proper right in bringing punishment upon those who stand against him and his people. Injustice and evil will be met with justice and his absolute goodness. We should also remember that this is not the only time God's future judgment is mentioned in the bible. Jesus himself spoke of it. See Mark 9:47-48 and Matthew 8:11-12. It is right to wrestle deeply and seriously about future judgment, and as we do, let's keep going back to what the bible has to say.

h) Why do you think Paul reminds them about the future?

i) Are the words of verses 5-10 of any help to you? Why / Why not?

Prayer for living in the present-in light of the Future

Verses 11-12 is Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian Christians. It is a prayer that God would do things in these people's lives. Note the first words of verse 11 – "With this in mind...." It is a prayer that acknowledges that the future should impact the way that we live now. The future is not something that is simply "pie in the sky when you die." It has real practical implications for living now. It is more like "steak on the plate while you wait!"

Unfortunately we've covered too much already to get into any detail with this prayer, but Paul is saying – because of future judgment (both in giving relief and punishment), I pray that you may live fruitful and productive Christian lives while you await this judgment. It really takes us back to the things that Paul gave thanks for in verses 3-4. As God has brought change and growth in them already, the prayer is that God may continue to change them and fulfill their godly purposes and desires.

Taking Action!

j) What can you do this year to see growth in the three areas of verses 3-4? Just pick one and take the time to think in terms of real concrete action. Also, is there anything your growth group can do together this year in the area of loving people more (inside and outside the group)?

	Individually	Growth Group
Faith in God		
Love for each other		
Perseverance		

Spend some time sharing and praying about these things.

For next week:

Working our way through the letter of 2 Thessalonians is like going on an outdoor hike where the two toughest peaks to climb are right at the start. You've climbed the first peak. The next one is 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Have a read of this passage in preparation for next time.

Also, continue to prayer about the concrete areas of action you identified on the previous page.