

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

RESCUED TODAY

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Pentecost 22 (Proper 24)

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 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 persons we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 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, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. 9 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, 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.

DIAGNOSIS: There's Always Tomorrow

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Exploitation*

When there is no pressure, we tend to relax, not work as hard, and even put off work till tomorrow. When there is no rule putting pressure on us for a certain behavior, we will do what we like and follow our passions or imitate those around us. We will take advantage of others and use them for our benefit (4:5b-6). Such behavior is due to our being “curved in on ourselves.” People around us are part of a culture that does not know God, that does not know the God who desires faith in him and love for our neighbor. So, even our culture is curved in on itself. We follow fads and fashions. __Our morals move with the masses. Christians can even misuse the command to love their neighbor by following their “lustful passion.” That passion is not just sexual misuse of others, but a passion for wealth that steals from companies and worker, or passion for promotion and success that takes credit for work that belong to another. We want to feel good and look good to others.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Idolatry*

Our gods are the passions that we follow to feel good and to look good. For “a god is whatever we look to for all good and in which we find refuge in all need.” Passions were the idols that the Thessalonians followed before Paul gave them the good news of the crucified and risen Christ. Now after they had heard of Christ and seen the power of the Spirit and the witness of Paul, they still were not completely free of their trust in idols. They did not trust Christ to be all that is good for them and their refuge in need. For the only thing that is good for us before an avenging God (4:6) is Christ alone. Our refuge before God's coming wrath is Christ. Yet, like the Thessalonians, we look to getting a better life from the god who will give us all

good and so be our refuge when we want comfort. But we only look for goodness and comfort from daily troubles and headaches and hassles. We never see that our migraine is God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Wrath is Coming*

God is coming and Christmas sleigh bells are not jingling. God who demands faith in him and love for neighbor “with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven” (4:16); he comes with wrath. The creator God’s wrath is more than a god’s anger that disrupts our life with sickness or a flat tire or too much pressure at work. God’s wrath for our lack of faith and or lack of love is death, to be cut off from God and God’s goodness completely and forever.

PROGNOSIS: Christ Is Here Today

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Jesus Rescues Us*

God, however, “has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that we may live with him” (5:9-10). By the message of Christ’s forgiveness, “God has chosen us” (1:4). As Paul gave the gospel to the Thessalonians to rescue them from God’s wrath, so we are given the gospel by those who proclaim Christ to us, who give us Christ’s goodness as ours, who give us forgiveness in Christ’s name, or who give us Christ in bread and wine. Christ overcomes God’s wrath and we know this because Christ has been raised from the dead. He absorbed God’s wrath for our sake so that in him we might have faith.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) – *What’s His is Ours*

Christ has turned God’s wrath by his death and resurrection, and he gives us himself as our safety before God. He offers us his forgiveness, his righteousness, his life. Faith makes all that Christ has done our very own. As Christ has died and risen, we

have died and risen. As Christ given us his forgiveness, we have it as our own. He is our savior whom we trust for all goodness before God. He is our refuge in our need of salvation before God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Imitation

As Christ is our goodness and joy, we no longer live by exploiting others for our own pleasure. Instead, we love others for their benefit. We become examples for those around us by our work of faith and love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not motivated by a pretext for greed (2:5) or trickery or deceit. We have the power of the Holy Spirit to be examples of service, to be of help today and not tomorrow. We can help the weak, encourage the faith hearted, always seeking to do good to one another and to all. We do not have to look good to others by the standards of our culture. We look good to God when we look like Christ, forgiven, serving, sacrificing, loving, and having mercy.