

## 25th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Thessalonians 3:1-13

How can Paul command the Thessalonian Christians to “keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life...” (vs.6) and also say, “...do not grow weary of doing good.” (vs.13)? Those two commands usually do not find common ground in our world. We know that we are to love everyone and doesn't that mean that we approve of everything that they do? As you can see from today's reading, Paul doesn't think so.

One problem in Thessalonica was that, like most early Christians (including the apostles), the local church believed that Jesus would be back “any day now.” Quite a number of years passed before the apostles began to realize that Jesus might not return in their lifetimes. Some of the Thessalonian Christians had carried the idea of Jesus' immanent return to the point of quitting their jobs, quitting their witness, and just sitting around waiting. They were living off the work of others while they contentedly waited for the last day.

“Doing good” toward these people included what we might call today “tough love.” That is, the love that demands a drug addict seek help, that a rebellious teen sit down with a counselor, that an abusive spouse stop, or even that friends enveloped in a sinful lifestyle understand that we love them, but that we cannot be around them until they seek help. And, that's not easy. Nor is that the last of Paul's instructions.

In addition to sometimes living out “tough love” we have to live a life ourselves that will encourage others to be more like us. That's what Paul did. He worked and prayed at being more like Jesus every day. Like Paul, we must encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ to live like our Lord, and to be effective in that encouragement we must set the example.

How do we do this without seeming to “lord it over” our fellow Christians? We take to heart some other passages from Paul where he confessed that he also was a great sinner, as are we. We also pray diligently for a heart like Jesus'; one that loves deeply and prays for and rejoices in another's victory over sin.

Learn more about living the Gospel in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

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2 Thessalonians 3:1-13

1. Paul requests prayers! What are his specific petition requests? (vs. 1, 2, 5)
2. Why could Paul (and why can we) be confident in our prayer life? (vs. 3-4)
3. Why is idleness such a concern for the Apostle? (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 5:14)
4. Was Paul bragging about his own industrious style (vs. 7-10)? What is his motivation as he uses himself for an example?

### For Family Reflection

5. Paul asks for prayers. For what do you want others to pray for you today? Who are some of the prayer partners in your life?
6. What idleness do you need to confess? Pray for the energy to be God's faithful and willing witness: “Let none hear you idly saying, ‘There is nothing I can do,’ while the multitudes are dying and the master calls for you.” (LW #318)

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 23:1-12

“Hypocrite”—“*somebody who pretends to have admirable principles, beliefs, or feelings but behaves otherwise*” (Encarta Dictionary). That is a simple and clear definition of the Pharisees of Jesus’ time. Jesus tells His followers that the religious leaders say, even demand, one thing and do another. Hypocrites haven’t disappeared over the last two thousand years. In truth all of us have managed to be hypocritical at some time, even if unintentionally.

The Pharisees believed that they deserved the best seats, largest symbols of the faith, and great respect. Yet, in their arrogance they doomed themselves, and many others, to never achieving their goal of salvation—all the while knowing that their professions of goodness were false; that their “method” of salvation wasn’t working.

A hypocrite is the antithesis of what Jesus calls us to be. A hypocrite is only a pretend servant. They see themselves as leaders, a cut above everyone else. They believe that what one says is more important than what one does because they think that what they say can give them power and respect. The Pharisees talked a good game in order to keep the regular people in their control, and perhaps even hoping to convince God of their own holiness.

The “pretending” part of hypocrisy in most cases concerns the attitude of the heart versus what we say, and it is the heart that will convict us when we least expect it. For instance, we wholeheartedly agree that everyone is welcome in our church (it’s the right thing to say)—until someone of a different color, culture, or class seats themselves at our side. Praising a fellow worker in order to impress the boss of your own leadership skills is hypocrisy. Bragging about your great grade on a test on which you cheated is hypocrisy.

The Pharisees were the worst of the hypocrites because they misled God’s people into false beliefs about salvation. Our hypocrisy, regardless of the situation, can also cause another’s faith to suffer—because our own hypocrisy can become our Christian witness.

Christ has died for all our hypocrisies. The Spirit frees us to speak and serve humbly. God can guard us from saying one thing and doing another; He can remind us before the deed is done—we need only to keep Him at the center of our lives, constantly seeking His will.

### Have you begun attending a Bible study?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 23:1-12

1. What motivated the “teachers of the law and the Pharisees?”
2. What are “phylacteries” (vs. 5)? How can a Godly item or reminder become something misdirected or inappropriate?
3. Who is our one Master? Who our one Father? Who is our one Teacher? What happens when the “One” is not number one?
4. These verses introduce “seven woes.” Skim the chapter and note the seven. If Jesus were speaking to us what might His “Woe to you . . .” state?

### For Family Reflection

5. Would you like to be great? What does it mean to be great? What is Jesus’ description of greatness?
6. What does it mean to “practice what you preach” (vs. 3)? How’s the practice going for the members of your family?

## 25th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 21:5-36

Many people believe that end times are only found in the prophetic writings and John's Revelation. But in Luke's gospel Jesus speaks of things to transpire as His return nears. First, he tells His followers not to get used to the beautiful temple that has been under construction for forty years. Shortly after its completion, it will have not one stone still atop the other.

He follows with a warning against false messiahs. Even before Jesus' ministry, there were perhaps hundreds of them in Palestine. Some were militant and led followers into destruction by the Romans. Others were ignored when their talk turned out to be just that, and they melted into the countryside. Jesus tells us, don't expect that to stop.

The next verses (12-24) concern the judgment coming upon Jerusalem, and a warning to His followers (not just the apostles) that they will be arrested, hated, and betrayed by their own relatives because they are His followers. How this happened is not unknown today. Christians who opposed the Nazi régime in Germany almost 2,000 years later were similarly arrested, tortured, and put to death for displaying the love of Jesus. Christians still die for Him.

Beginning in verse 25 Jesus teaches about His return. What will it be like? If you read about the 4.3 earthquake in Oklahoma recently, you may have thought "Oh my." But we need not fear, especially wars, atom bombs, terrorists, etc. While they may take life and make the world a more tumultuous place, when the return of Christ nears, the things we see will be the work of God—"signs in sun and moon and stars," "roaring of the sea and the waves," "powers of the heavens will be shaken." None will wonder if man has caused this.

Jesus' closing remarks are easily summarized. Imagine that you are walking down a dark trail through the woods with your father. There is danger present and what danger isn't really there is provided by your imagination. Your father says, "Just stay close to me and hold my hand. Nothing will happen that can stop me from protecting you."

The end of what we now know as our world will drastically change, and it may be a little unnerving, but God Himself will hold us in His hand. Will we in turn be holding the hand of a friend with whom we have shared Christ?

*Is Bible study part of your Christian walk?*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## 25th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 21:5-36

1. Jesus the Prophet shares prophecies in these verses. What future event does Jesus predict in verse 5-9? What warning accompanies the prediction?
2. What happenings does Jesus foretell in verses 10-19? What warnings are given to Jesus' listeners? Would everything be dismal for the faithful?
3. What event is prophesied in vs. 20-24? Using a Bible dictionary or other reference explore when and how Jesus' prophesy was fulfilled?
4. Jesus' prophecies culminate in vs. 27. How will Jesus come again? When will Jesus' come again? According to vs. 28 what's the Good News about Jesus' second coming?

### For Family Reflection

5. There are games and individuals who claim to have the power to foretell the future. Can they be trusted? What's the difference between Jesus' predictions and human predictions?
6. What does Jesus mean when he says "stay awake" in verse 36? What are we to stay awake for? Do we have to fear Jesus' coming?