

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-17
DON'T BE SHAKEN

The picture on the screen is a picture of Eddystone Lighthouse off the coast of Devon; it protects shipping from the dangerous rocks on which it is built. This is the fourth version of the lighthouse: the first started operating in 1698, a wooden structure, which lasted 5 years till it was destroyed in the 'Great Storm' of 1703. The second version was completed in 1709, again wooden but this time with a core of brick and concrete; the top of the building caught fire in 1755 and the building was again destroyed. The third version pioneered the use of granite blocks and began operation in 1759 and lasted till 1877 when the rocks on which it was built began to be eroded and the foundations became dodgy, such that the lighthouse moved from side to side when it was hit by large waves; it was moved to Plymouth. The fourth version was opened in 1882 and has been there ever since, at 161 feet high and the light can be seen 22 miles away; ships are diverted away from the dangerous rocks.

Lighthouses have to with stand enormous pressures at times; some of the storms that the sea throws up appear almost to swamp them from time to time; yet they stand, unshakeable. This is a mixture of three things:

- The materials of which they are made: wooden buildings didn't last long, but a mix of stone and concrete proves to be more substantial;
- Good design, much of it by the Stevenson family, designing buildings to withstand such enormous pressure; they learned to build them round rather than square, because the wind bounces off and goes round;
- Good foundations make the building solid and able to stand firm, not being shaken; these foundations are driven deep into the rock.

Put these three things together and you have a recipe for a lighthouse to do its job no matter what the weather, or the sea throws at it.

The first century world was tough for Christians. As well as the struggles in life that we all face, they were being persecuted for their faith. In the piece of 2 Thessalonians 2 we didn't read, Paul writes about the "man of lawlessness" and evil in their world, who sets himself up against God and opposes God and opposes the people of God. They began to speculate: who is this "man of lawlessness"? It is the Roman Empire? Is it the emperor Nero? There have been other answers in the centuries since. Perhaps it is Paul's way of describing the world, that evil exists and here the man of lawlessness personifies that evil and the struggle Christians have. He declares that Jesus will overcome evil, will overthrow this power when He comes and everything will be set in order, the judge of all earth setting things right. Christians are "unsettled", shaken from their composure by evil and by the fact that Jesus has not come back yet. How are they to keep Christian faith in that kind of world?

Our world is not very different. This time last year we marked one hundred years since the end of the First World War and the evil it visited on Europe and the millions of people who lost their lives in the mud of France's battlefields; the So-called "war to end all wars!" This year we mark eighty years since the outbreak of the Second World War and the new kinds of evil it visited on the world through the Blitz and the Holocaust. We're told to remember so that we don't repeat these mistakes, but the cities of Syria today show everything destroyed, homes, schools, hospitals, lives, by the civil war that still goes on there, sponsored by the United States and Russia. That's before we talk about civil wars in Africa or other places in the Middle East, or Afghanistan. We can add people trafficking, poverty, famine, and refugees. There is so much in our world that unsettles us, that causes us to be shaken from our composure; what do we do?

We want a solid foundation for our lives; we have that in Jesus. Paul would have said the same about the Christians in Thessalonica, but people were undermining the truth. "The Day

of Lord has already come” was a lie, set out to deceive and undermine Christian faith and had the effect of unsettling the Christians, shaking what they thought were the foundations of their faith. There was a study of social media by Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2016,17 which showed that fake news items were 70% more likely to be shared than things that were true. Genuine stories took 6 times longer to reach the target group of 1500 people than false stories. People heard lies more quickly and more easily than they heard the truth; what does that say about our society? Where do we find solid foundations for life?

“So then...” (2 Thessalonians 2:15a) The opposite of being alarmed and unsettled; being resolute and firm, being unshaken and unshakable. Here’s what that means: “hold to...” (2 Thessalonians 2:15b) A good foundation for faith and life comes from the Bible. It matters what we believe. Not everything we hear or read out there is true; not everything we hear being peddled in the name of religion is good. Our firm foundation comes from knowing and understanding what the Bible teaches especially about Jesus; He is the rock of our salvation and we need to build our lives firmly on Him. This is what Paul has been teaching the churches from the beginning either by his preaching in person when he went to visit, or by his letters written to them when he was away. His life is lived pointing people to Jesus so that they believe in Him.

We are:

1. “brothers...” (2 Thessalonians 2:13)
2. “from the...” (2 Thessalonians 2:13)
3. “He called...” (2 Thessalonians 2:14)
4. “you might share...” (2 Thessalonians 2:14)
5. “God the Father who loved us” (2 Thessalonians 2:16)
6. “by His...” (2 Thessalonians 2:16)

Here are six jigsaw pieces that tell us something about who we are as Christians, something about what God has done for us; six reasons to stand firm, six pieces of the foundation that God has laid for us that say something about us and who we are and something about what God has done for us; and we stand on this foundation and can stand firm. God has made us His people; He has been at work in us by Spirit; He has loved us from the start of time; He has called us to be His and to belong to Him; He has promised us a share in His glory; He has given us His grace every single day to help and strengthen us for every single day.

“May our...” (2 Thessalonians 2:16a, 17) It is God who gives us the courage and strength to live life and to live life by faith! It is Jesus who is the rock of our salvation. Lots of things in our world alarm us, and shake our composure: world events such as those we remember today; personal stories that have good days and dark days; the sense of evil in the world that subverts what we consider to be good and right; the church that wanders away from what the Bible teaches us is true. There are lots of things to alarm us, to shake our composure. God gives us courage; God gives us strength; God loves us; Jesus is the rock of our salvation. Here is the strong foundation for life; here is the foundation that will withstand everything that the world throws at us; here is the foundation for life and faith that will lead us to glory and will bring light to the world.

Does all of that sound too simplistic for our complex world? Surely we need something more sophisticated than that, something more in line with our twenty-first century age when we can solve all kinds of problems and answer all sorts of questions! Here’s the thing: sometimes the truth is simple! Sometimes we don’t need complicated! Here is a simple truth: Jesus is with us everywhere we go, in all the circumstances of our lives. That is all we need to know and all we need to believe; keep believing that and the things that alarm us or shake our composure can be overcome!

Stand firm; love the truth; keep believing; trust Jesus; be the person God has called you to be; find courage, strength and hope in Jesus.