

7.9.25 am

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Date: 07 September 2025

Preacher: Christopher Ash

[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. Welcome to the service this morning. A special welcome to those who are visiting with us.

! It is always good and encouraging to see you.! We will be blessed to have Christopher and Carolyn with us for the devotion of the Dehazel.

Christopher, Ash and Carolyn were with us last year. I think we were going to do the fellowship in the evening. So, the Lord Tannis decided to come back to the holiday and he has a little holiday. He is a very gracious day to preach. Christopher features a life in the world. He was a minister for many years. He has written various books as well.

Anything that I say about Psalms and the Wednesday evening, Christopher, is probably written in his commentaries. And so, we are really thankful to have you both with us today. The notices are being on the screen before the service began and also in the email adding up as far out.

[1 : 21] And I will not be able to read through all of them but I will be able to hear on the page. And I will just type a couple of things. If you are in service at 6th please, please be able to hear along with that.

And the new first of the meetings are the first time quite a long time so that's half past seven, we will have at last 8th. This morning is on Wednesday, and on Friday this week, so Saturday in November, is getting married on the 12th of September, that's Friday the Lord's record.

The church family will be invited to the church family to the wedding ceremony at 2.30am, followed by afternoon tea in the church. They would be delighted to see the future, so please, and all that. Saturday, Saturday, September, which is on Saturday, we've had a foundational meal, and then we'll start from the vice group with us Saturday night and Sunday.

So the foundational meal will be usually half past six, as it's time to go, half past six is on Saturday, and there's a sheet at front of the church for anyone who can get the donations of the Lord.

[2 : 35] So the name of the church, is a great name. A couple more. Next Sunday services, then we will take part in the service next Sunday morning.

And I'm going to do that service, I'm not going to do that yet. But that's for the morning service, the evening service, I'll take myself, God willing, at 6pm. A couple of dates, three dates for your diary. The first one, Friday the 19th of September, half past seven. Hospitality evening, Andrew and Renee's in Manning. They've got a lovely place, limited space, so let them know if you intend to go there, so we can be aware of how many we can take.

The hope is that there will be hospitality evenings, once a month, within the church family. So Renee and Andrew will host this one for this month, on the 19th of September, and Kiki and Anna have agreed to do the one for October.

So it's just for the aim of sharing hospitality and fellowshiping together. Two dates for the diary left. 18th to 21st of September is the Scalpie Communion, please note that.

[3 : 48] And the 3rd to the 5th of October is our own communion season here. So I think we had it that day last year. It didn't clash with Scalpie, and we want to do that again this year.

So that's the 3rd to the 5th of October for our own communion weekend. These, I think, are all the notices that I need to highlight. So let's begin this time of worship.

Let's worship God as we sing to his praise from Psalm 100. Psalm 100. All people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice, himself with mirth, his praise forth tell, come ye before him and rejoice.

We'll sing the whole of this psalm. We'll stand to sing to God's praise. Amen. For people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice, Him said with mirth, his praise forth tell, come ye before him and rejoice.

know that the Lord is God in thee.

[5 : 33] With our talent, He did us pray. We are his love, He doth us meet, and for his sheep He doth us take.

More enter than his gates with grace, approach with joy his poor Son too.

Praise Lord and bless his name for grace.

For it is seemingly so to do.

For by the Lord our God is good, His mercy is forever sure, His truth at all times firmly stood, And shall from age to age and joy.

[7 : 34] Well, let's unite our hearts together. Thank you. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, your day.

We thank you for your word which we have sung. And we acknowledge with gratefulness that your word is truth in a world that is so difficult to find the truth in.

We thank you that we have the truth in our hands as we stand to sing. We thank you that we have the truth before us in a language that we can understand as we open your word.

And we thank you that that word of God, the truth of God, that stands firm through the ages.

Everything, material, temporal, will pass away.

But we thank you that the word of God endures forever. We pray that that word would go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit today.

[8 : 42] that as we read it and as Christopher preaches, that we would recognize that this is the word of God and not the word of man.

And we pray that as we come under your word that we would know the truth about ourselves and the truth about our God. We thank you that you have loved us enough to tell us the truth about who we are.

We are those who have been created in the image of God and what an honour and a blessing that is. And yet, your word makes clear and we know, we know within ourselves that we are not the way that we were designed to be.

We know that this world is a world that struggles and groans with that condition of sin, the curse of sin that came in through Adam. And we, as Adam's children, know the reality of that sin in our lives day by day, week by week.

And we thank you that as we come together that we don't have to try to justify ourselves, we don't have to hide from you as Adam first tried. we thank you that we can come into your presence as our Father and acknowledge and confess that we are sinners and we need that cleansing that you alone are able to bring to us.

[10 : 16] And Father, we thank you for sending your Son Jesus into this world, the mercy of God that we are sung of, the grace of God that we sing of and see throughout all of Scripture leads us to the cross of Christ where the one who knew no sin became sin so that we who are sinners could be saved, forgiven, cleansed through all that he has done.

We thank you that the blood of Jesus is powerful and it cleanses us from all sin, not some, but all sin, all unrighteousness when we confess that sin.

So hear us as we make our confession even in the quietness of our own hearts as we think about the things that we have said and done and not said and not done that have been grieving to you.

We ask the Lord for that forgiveness. And we thank you for the good news of the Gospel. Not only do we have the truth about who we are, but we thank you that there is that truth about who you are, the God who is gracious and merciful and slow to anger, abounding in love.

And we praise you, Lord, that the work of salvation is finished, the gift of grace is offered, and all we have to do is believe. So give us faith, we pray, that we would believe, that we would know the reality and the joy of your salvation, that we would know the freedom that comes with being cleansed in the blood of Jesus, and that we would know the joy of resurrection, eternal life.

[12 : 08] We pray, Father, for those today who are struggling. We think of a world that is so obviously broken. We think of places where there is warfare, as we see further strikes in Ukraine and Russia.

We pray for the Middle East. We pray for so many areas in the world where there is so much suffering, asking that you would intervene, that you would bring peace where there is war, that you would bring relief where there is suffering.

We pray for our nation here, you have told us to pray for those who are in authority over us, and as we see that changing so often, that we ask, Lord, that you would give wisdom to those that you've allowed to hold these offices, and we pray that they would be humbled to the extent that they would look to you as the God who gives wisdom to those who ask.

Draw us back, we pray as a nation, to your word. Lord, we pray for our community here and for ourselves. You know each one of us. You know what's going on in our hearts.

You know what's going on in our homes. You know what's going on in our workplaces. love for our And as we feel a sense of need in many different ways, as we may crave peace to release us from anxiety, or strength to break free from addiction, comfort for those who are suffering with grief, as we crave a healing touch for those who are sick, remembering especially Lydia, still in hospital in Glasgow.

[13 : 59] We ask, Lord, that you would meet each one of us at the point of our need, and that you would enable us to know your touch, to hear our prayers, and lead us and guide us as we seek to worship you.

We thank you that we have that promise that we're two or three meet in the name of Jesus, you are here, and that to bless. So bless us, we pray as we look to you. And we ask all this in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Boys and girls would you like to come forward please just over here and I'm going to ask my friend Christopher to come and he's going to speak to you today which is probably just as well I was thinking last night if I had to speak I wasn't sure if Christopher would definitely talk I was thinking I'll definitely talk about the cup final but my children's talk changed six times in the course of 120 minutes and I'm glad I don't have to give it now so Christopher could you come and share a word well good morning boys and girls we haven't met I don't think before but I've got grandchildren do you know how anyone would like to guess how many grandchildren I've got four it's more than four keep going up five six keep going ten it is ten grandchildren and there are lots of different ages but it's lovely to see you in the Bible passage that I'm going to be speaking about later when I preach to the grown-ups the Bible talks about a church whose faith was growing so I want to talk to you about growing put your hand up if you are growing

I'd be really worried if you're not so do any of you have at home one of those little things like on the kitchen wall which shows how high you are how tall you are sometimes people do that don't they do you know if you if you go to a theme park or something somewhere and they say you're only allowed to go on this ride if you're more than so high and you sometimes see boys and girls standing up against it and thinking am I am I tall enough and they stretch up as much as they can to see if they can be tall enough so you're all growing aren't you you're growing taller are you growing in other ways are any of you growing heavier growing heavier yeah well the minister's growing heavier

I think I'm probably growing heavier we have some some friends in our church and they've got a little baby boy well he's not so little and he's growing and growing and his mummy who's quite small finds it quite hard to carry him because he's growing heavier now let me talk to you about another way you might be growing I'm sure you all are growing in in understanding things so you begin as you grow you begin to learn letters and numbers and words and things like that and I wonder if if any of you are learning fishing have you ever any of you ever been fishing did you ever did you catch a fish well done how big was the fish that you caught I went I went fishing up north of [18 : 07] Loch Inver years ago and I tried so hard for a whole week and I didn't catch a single fish but there's a friend of ours he's about he's about 16 or 17 now and he's learning to fish he's there a Scottish family and his daddy's teaching him to fish and he showed me a photo of the most wonderful salmon he caught on the fly just this summer so maybe some of you will grow in your in your being able to do things and the Bible talks talks about a growing a growing in faith does anybody know what faith means anybody tell me what faith means any ideas what does it mean to have faith in Jesus yes any idea what it means to have faith in Jesus you're three years old that's very good so you have you can trust

Jesus as a three year old and that's really really good and faith means trusting trusting Jesus and growing in faith I'm going to be talking to the grown ups about this means learning to trust Jesus more and you're three as well that's really good so two three year olds is anybody younger than three no I don't think anybody's younger than three here this morning no some of you are definitely well older than three I can tell that so boys and girls as you grow as you grow taller and you grow

heavier and you grow better at doing things and you learn to fish or whatever it is you're learning to do I want to pray that you'll learn to trust Jesus more the more you grow so that you're not just growing on the outside and not just growing in your head and your hands and things but you're growing to trust Jesus more and more let me say a short prayer and we'll ask God to help you with that heavenly father please help these boys and girls as they grow to trust and love

Jesus more and more in his name Amen Thank you for listening boys and girls lovely to meet you Christopher thank you we're going to sing again now to God's praise the words on the screen your grace that calls this sinner hope from death to life forever and sings a song of righteousness by blood and not by merit your grace that reaches broad and wide to every tribe and nation has called my heart to enter in the joy of your salvation by grace

I am redeemed by grace I am restored and now I freely walk into the arms of Christ my Lord through grace that I cannot explain not by my earthly wisdom the prince of life without a stain was traded for this sinner by grace I am redeemed by grace I am restored and now I freely walk into the arms of Christ my Lord when grace rise up and overflow my song resumed forever for grace will see me welcomed home to walk beside my

Savior by grace I am redeemed by grace I am restored and now I freely walk into the arms of Christ my Lord a few boys and girls if you have to stand as you remember to pray for them as you go and I'll invite you to come and be God's word what a squeeze thank you so much for your welcome it's a privilege and a joy for me and

[24 : 51] Carolyn to be with you so if you have a Bible there you might like to turn to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians second Thessalonians and I'm going to read the first full verses from chapter one which is the passage that I shall preach later on so let us hear God's word Paul Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ we ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers as it is right because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring so God willing

I shall preach that a little later we now sing again to God's praise and we'll sing this time from Psalm 124 Psalm 124 and we'll sing the last two stanzas of that Psalm verses 7 and verse 8 I'll read the verses in English we sing this in Gaelic we remain seated to sing in Gaelic our souls escaped as a bird out of the fowler's snare the snare of some are broken as and we escaped on our sure and all sufficient help is in Jehovah's name the name who did the heavens create and who the earth did free these two verses of Psalm 124 and we'll sing to God's praise miracle

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[28 : 51] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 21] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Let's bow our heads.

amen so do turn back please if you will to um second Thessalonians chapter one uh it's a a letter I preached at our home church Cambridge Presbyterian Church over this summer while our minister was on a sabbatical and um it's a short not very well known letter uh the church in Thessalonica in northern Greece or what what was in those days Macedonia was a church um that was started we can read in the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 17 how Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica which was a a large significant city in the Greek and Roman world and they came there and they they they went to the synagogue and they preached that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus is Lord and a a number of people believed but a lot of opposition was stirred up and they were just there for three sabbath days three sabbaths in the synagogue that was all so somewhere between two and a bit and three weeks something like that they were there and then they went they were drummed out of the the city and in the days that followed uh Paul wrote two letters what we have in our New

Testament as first and second uh letters to the Thessalonians um to that church and then in Acts chapter 20 a little bit later uh he and his missionary companions went back to that region and probably to that church amongst others and so in between he he wrote these these two um letters and it's quite clear that the church in Thessalonica was having a really hard time right from the get-go right from the beginning it was really hard to be a follower of Jesus in Thessalonica it's it's clear in Acts chapter 17 from the opposition which was violent and hostile and it's it's clear in the first letter to the Thessalonians you might like to read it later on perhaps later on this afternoon to read through the first letter to the Thessalonians and you'll see that that suffering and affliction and persecution is a really prominent um theme there and it's the same in this second letter so in the few verses I read he he he Paul the apostle speaks about their steadfastness and faith in all their persecutions and the afflictions that they're enduring and so the question I want to begin with really for for for you here in North Harris Free Church is this what do you say to a church that's going through great suffering and persecution and I suppose in in in our part of the world in in the British Isles it's there's a slight air of unreality about this because there is opposition to be a Christian um I mean sometimes a number of you may have had a snide remark made to you about being a Christian or made behind your back or somebody laughing at you for being a Christian um at school at college in the workplace in the neighborhood that that happens there are threats of restrictive legislation sometimes that we we think are going to make it harder to be a Christian and there is there is opposition

I think of a senior academic friend of mine in um in a university who was was told he was a very very good scientist and he was told the reason you haven't been made head of your department um is because you're a Christian so you do have sometimes opposition but compared to our brothers and sisters in northern Nigeria or in Syria or in Iran or many other parts of the world the kind of opposition we face is not um not not not on that sort of scale but the Bible warns us in Acts chapter 14 where Paul says to the church in Lystra um he says through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God and the Bible makes it quite clear that to be a Christian we must expect there will be times when things are difficult and so although as far as I know and and trust and hope your life as a church here is is is full of lots of encouragements and joys and wonderful things there will be times and maybe for some of you in the past in church life there have been times when it's been really really hard to be a Christian and the question is what do you need to know and Paul's first and second letters to the church in Thessalonica are a really good place to go if you want to know what does a church need to know and I wanted uh the apostle talks in both letters of affliction in both letters he talks about the return of the Lord Jesus and he lifts their heads to look forward to Jesus's return and to think about that he encourages them to live godly lives as they they wait for that and to persevere through trials um but I I simply want to focus this morning this afternoon we'll be looking at this evening at a wonderful passage later in the same letter the beginning of chapter three which which will help us in our prayers I think but for this morning I I simply want to to focus on this introduction to the letter that the Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians has not been it's not very popular our home church in Cambridge it's it had never been preached at least in website memory um until this summer that may be because it's a little bit similar to the first letter to the Thessalonians it's also because in the middle of the letter in chapter two there's a very puzzling passage about the the man of lawlessness or the man of sin which puzzles everybody and I think it sometimes frightens preachers off preaching the letter because we have to get to that very puzzling passage well I'm not going to try and preach it to you although I did have a go at our church in um in Cambridge earlier in the in the summer I want us to take away three things from the way Paul opens the letter three things the church in Thessalonica needed to know three things that you need to know and three things that our home church in Cambridge needs to know three things that any church needs to know um so as to be ready for hard times and difficult times and the first is this it focuses on who we are and I'm simply going to take the first verse for this if um one or two of you may have been at conferences where there are a number of

[39 : 49] Christian ministers or pastors and the conversation sometimes goes like this at um coffee time that one pastor will say to another pastor tell me about the church you serve and the answers that we give tend to be well on a Sunday morning we have roughly this sort of number and the evening this sort of number and and they're sort of these ages and those ages and um these are their kinds of backgrounds and culture and these are the kinds of people they are and it's all very interesting isn't it you could do that here I could ask you you know what kind of people are you you could ask me what kind of people are they in Cambridge to which the answer is very odd but um

those are the kinds of answers that we naturally give but the apostle Paul gives a remarkable answer uh so he the letter begins Paul and then

Silvanus who was one of Paul's missionary colleagues he's also known as Silas so when he his name was written in a Roman context he was Silvanus in a Greek context he was Silas much as somebody might have a name that they'll give if they're speaking Gaelic or a name they'll give if they're speaking English same person Silvanus or Silas one of Paul's missionary colleagues and Timothy was one of his closest co-workers and certainly Silas had been with Paul in Thessalonica probably Timothy had been at some at some point so they probably knew these these three men and they could speak Paul Silvanus and Timothy they knew what it was to pay a price for following Jesus they knew it was tough so they could they could they could speak with authenticity people thought okay they know what they're talking about and in a way when I read Paul Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians and so on grace to you and peace those of you who've been as many of you will have been bible readers for a long time you'll think well that's just the normal sort of way of starting a letter if you if you wrote a letter in those days you'd say something like Hamish to my family greetings I thank God for you that's just how you'd start a letter Hamish you'd start with your name as the writer to my family whoever you're writing to greetings I thank God for you that's just the normal way of starting a letter in in those in those days and it's easy just to skip over it but I want us to just focus for a minute on this because it'll it'll show us who we are first of all he says to the church which means an assembly a congregation what we are now a gathering together of men and women and and children and right back into the old testament when the people of

Israel gathered at Mount Sinai Moses described that as the day of the assembly you get that phrase sometimes in the book of Deuteronomy the day of the gathering the day of the congregation the day of church and there the the point is this that these men and women in Thessalonica were not isolated individually individuals wandering around Thessalonica who occasionally came together on a Sunday on the Lord's Day to be to meet in church they were the church in that place even though sometimes they weren't actually gathered and there's quite a difference there if you think about that if you belong to Christ you belong to Christ's church and you are a part if you if you're a member of of this church you belong to this church there'll be plenty of times on Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday when you're not physically gathered with your brothers and sisters in this church family but nonetheless that's who you are so church is not not a place that you simply attend as an individual it's it's a gathering to which you you belong so that there are the church secondly notice they're defined by where they are they're the church of the Thessalonians this prosperous city it was on a big trade route but think about it they're then they're defined by where they are it's the church of the Thessalonians they're not defined by anything else they're not defined by their social class it's not the church of the upper class Thessalonians or the church of the lower class Thessalonians or the church of the men in Thessalonica or the church of the women in Thessalonica or the church of the rich Christians in Thessalonica or the church of the poor Christians in Thessalonica or the church of the highly educated Christians in Thessalonica and the church of the less educated

[45 : 09] Christians in Thessalonica there's simply what unites them is that they're in Christ and they're in Thessalonica. It's one of the most wonderful things about the Church of Christ.

You belong to a church, and I don't know if you ever do this, you kind of look round your brothers and sisters on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening and you think, what a very odd lot we are. I'm not insulting you because I do the same in Cambridge where we live. You look round and think, if it weren't for Jesus, we'd never be together. I mean, some of us would because we have lots of other things in common, but some of us, we have nothing else in common except Christ.

But if we have Christ in common, we have everything. So there are the Church, there are Thessalonica, but here's the really big thing. Look what the Apostle says to the Church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Christian is a man, a woman, or a child in Christ, in union with Christ, as a branch is united with a vine, as a limb is united with a body.

[46 : 23] A Christian is a man or woman in Christ. But interestingly here, it's a little bit unusual. The Apostle says, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the Bible doesn't, the New Testament doesn't often use that sort of expression. Often, often, often says we're in Christ. And that's a wonderful thing. Doesn't so often say we are in God the

Father.

We're united with God the Father. And yet, it's true. At the beginning of his first letter, the Apostle John says that we, the Apostles, we have fellowship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. And as you believe our message, you have fellowship with us, and therefore you have fellowship with the Father and the Son. And it's a wonderful thing, if you belong to Jesus Christ, that you and I can say that God is our Father.

The Lord Jesus, before his ascension, could say, I'm ascending to my Father and your Father. And you and I have a heavenly Father who watches over us.

[47 : 37] He rules over us. He cares for us. Not a hair can fall for our heads, but our Father sees and knows and cares and watches. And he hears our prayers in the name of Jesus.

And as the Lord Jesus said shortly before he died in John chapter 14, we, the Father and the Son, will come to the one who believes in me.

We'll come and we'll make our home with him. So here's the most wonderful thing. You are on Harris. Harris surrounds you.

You might occasionally venture into Lewis. You might even go to the mainland. But that's the world in which you live. For some of you, that's the world where you were raised and brought up.

That's what you know and see. But if you belong to Jesus, you are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[48 : 35] And they dwell by the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son dwell in your heart by faith.

That is who you are. And if you and I are going to go through difficult days, we need to know that.

It's really simple, but it's really fundamental. So if somebody says to you, tell me about the church to which you belong, by all means, tell them where it is and what sort of people come to it and ages and all that kind of thing.

It's very interesting to know that. But at a more deep level, you might want to say, well, the most important thing about us is that we are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And God the Father who made the world and the Lord Jesus, his eternal Son, by the Holy Spirit, live in us. That's who we are.

And therefore, whatever affliction comes to you, whatever tough times come to you, however difficult it is to follow Jesus, nothing can change the Father's love for you and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[49 : 56] Well, I've dwelt on that at some length. Now, more briefly, who we are, we're in the Father and the Son. What do we have, verse 2? Well, we have grace and peace. And the Apostle begins and ends the letter with this.

Right at the end of the letter, at the end of chapter 3, he says, the Lord of peace. May the Lord of peace give you peace at all times, in every way. And he says, grace be with you all.

Grace, undeserved, overflowing love that begins in eternity. If you belong to Jesus Christ, God the Father dwells in you by the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus is united with you by the Holy Spirit, through faith, entirely by grace. And that overflowing love defines who you are and flows into you.

And nothing can change that. It can't be earned by your good behaviour. It can't be earned by your trying to be good, by your watching your language.

[50 : 57] All of these are things we should do, and I hope we do try to do. But the grace of God is not earned by any of that. And therefore, it can't be lost through our undeserving, because we never deserved it in the first place.

And it's a wonderful thing. Who are we? We are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. What do we have? We have grace poured into us. Grace that's sufficient for every need.

As the Apostle says to another church in Philippi, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. By the grace of God, whatever you face this week, the grace of God in Jesus Christ is sufficient for you.

And peace. Peace with God. By nature, I was at war with God. I couldn't make peace with God. I was unable to do that. God has made peace with me through the death of the Lord Jesus to atone for our sins on the cross.

So who we are, we belong to the Father and the Son and the Spirit. What do we have? We have grace and peace. And now thirdly, how we grow. Just have a look at what the Apostle says.

[52 : 08] It's a wonderful thing. He says in verse 3, We ought always to give thanks to God for you. Brothers, my fellow Christians. As is right in the old language, it's our bounden duty to do that.

It would be wrong for us not to give thanks to God for you. It's not just that I'm giving thanks to God for you because I'm feeling in a good mood and I've had a nice cup of coffee. It's, I've got to give thanks to God for you because I can see that God is doing something in you which only God can do.

And the Apostle mentions two things that God is doing. And he thanks God because God is doing it. And the first is their growing faith. He says, We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly.

Or as one writer puts it, it's luxuriating like a tropical plant. We used to live in London and sometimes we'd go to the tropical house, plant house in Kew Gardens.

And you'd see these enormous plants just luxuriating and growing tremendously. Sometimes you see that if you have a garden. Sometimes Carolyn's a keen gardener and sometimes she'll say, Come and have a look.

[53 : 29] Look how this has grown since last year. Look how it's growing. And the Apostle says your faith is growing like that. And it's just worth thinking of this, that you will know if you're a Christian.

This is kind of Christianity 101. You'll know that to be a Christian you need to have faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

You don't need me to tell you that. We all know that. Every Christian knows that. If you're not as yet a Christian, this is how you begin as a Christian.

You trust Jesus as Saviour and bow to him as Lord. But faith isn't a static thing simply that you have or you don't have. It grows.

And here's how it grows because I really want us to think about this. Our faith, if you're a Christian, grows through trials.

[54 : 29] It grows as I learn that my Father is trustworthy and Jesus, my Saviour, walks with me through a trial.

And it's... I was thinking about this summer. I was reading in the Old Testament of some pagan enemies of the people of God.

And they'd been defeated by Israel. And they'd fought them up on a battle on some hills. And they'd lost. And so these pagans said, you know, the problem is that their God is a God of the hills.

But our gods are gods of the plains. So if we fight them on the plains, then we'll win. And of course, they were hopelessly wrong because our God is a God of the hills and the plains.

But you and I do that. If you're a Christian, there'll be times when you have said to yourself, and you may not want to admit this, but I've done this. You'll say, I can testify that God my Father cared for me and Jesus my Saviour upheld me then and there in the past.

[55 : 43] But as I face the challenge and the trial that I face now, I'm not sure that he can here and now. You ever thought that?

I mean, the moment you bring that out into the open, you think, well, that can't be true. That can't be right. But we do that. And our faith grows through trials.

As a new trial comes and we learn in that trial that God our Father cares for us and that the grace of Jesus is sufficient for us in that trial.

It's an extraordinary thought that the Lord Jesus, in the days of his flesh, grew in faith. Always he trusted the Father perfectly.

He never mistrusted his Father. And yet the letter to the Hebrews says he learned obedience through what he suffered. And if you think about it, the first time somebody misrepresented Jesus, he learned that his Father could be trusted through being insulted.

[56 : 53] The first time he was insulted. He learned that his Father could be trusted through being insulted. The first time he learned that his Father could be trusted through betrayal.

And he learned that his Father could be trusted. And he grew in faith from perfect faith to a greater perfect faith.

It's a wonderful thought, isn't it, when you think of the Lord Jesus in the days of his flesh. And the apostle says that you as a church, your faith is growing abundantly.

Now, here's the thing. How can you tell whether the faith of North Harris Free Church is growing abundantly?

And in our Western individualistic way, we tend to think, well, maybe if we could find a little faith scanner and we could scan each individual and we could see if their faith is growing, then we could take a sort of mean average and see on average is the faith of this church growing or decreasing. [58 : 13] But that's the wrong way to think. The way to think is this. We as a church, you as a church, are to be, by God's grace, the kind of fellowship where faith luxuriates and grows, which means things like this.

One of you is going through a time of trial. Maybe a time of great sorrow or sadness or difficulty where it's really hard to be a Christian.

And he or she finds themselves surrounded in church by brothers and sisters, by family, who encourage them and who say, you know, God is faithful.

And so often when I face difficult times, I don't need people to tell me things I don't know. But I badly need Christian brothers and sisters to remind me of things I do know and to say, yes, God, your heavenly father cares for you.

He hasn't stopped watching over you. Jesus, your savior, walks with you. He hasn't stopped walking with you. He cares for you. And then when my brothers and sisters tell me that, I think, yes, that's right, isn't it?

[59 : 25] That's what I believe. And my faith is strengthened. And to be the kind of fellowship where when one or another goes through affliction, we weep with those who weep.

We care for one another. You care for one another. And I'm sure you do this in all sorts of ways, that you encourage one another and your faith grows as a church.

And along with that, the apostle says, your love, the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. They're loving, they're caring for one another in all sorts of different ways.

It's lovely to hear about the hospitality evenings coming up. And that's just, I guess, one of the many ways in which you care for one another.

You love one another. You encourage one another in faith. You get alongside one another. And when I don't know enough about Harris, but in Cambridge, if somebody says, how are you?

[60 : 29] The usual answer is, I'm fine, even if my heart is breaking inside. And church should be a place where we don't do that.

Somebody says, how are you? And if your heart's breaking, you say something about it. You may not want to tell them everything about everything. But it's a place where we're vulnerable with one another.

And we say, actually, I really need your prayers this week. I'm finding it hard to follow Jesus. And that's a wonderful thing. And the church in Thessalonica seems to have been like that.

And so the apostle says in verse four, we boast about you. In other words, we're not boasting that I'm a great apostle. We're boasting that God is wonderful.

And we're saying, look at their steadfastness and their faith. They're having a really hard time. Look at them. And you will see how strong and faithful and good God is.

[61 : 31] Would it not be a wonderful thing if in September 2026, somebody who'd been here in September 2025 could come back to this church and think, I can see that this is a church whose faith is growing abundantly and their love for one another is increasing.

Would that not be a wonderful, wonderful thing? And as you are that kind of church by God's grace, you will be ready for the tough times that come, tough times that come for individuals or families, tough times that come perhaps for the whole church at some point.

None of us knows when these trials will come. But to be the church in Thessalonica was a church that had been wonderfully prepared by God for the intense suffering that they endured.

May this be true of you. Let's be quiet for a moment. I'll say a prayer and then we'll sing our final hymn. Amen.

God, our Father, we praise you and thank you for the growing faith and the growing love of this afflicted little church in Thessalonica.

[63 : 04] And we thank you for every evidence here in Tarbot of that growing faith and love in this church fellowship. We praise and thank you for every church we know of which that is true.

And we pray that by your grace our faith together as churches might grow and luxuriate and our love for one another might increase so that you will be honoured and glorified in and through us.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Our final hymn in Mission Praise number 640, The Church is One Foundation.

It's a hymn that was written in the middle of the 19th century at a time when a number of churches, particularly in those days the Church of England, was struggling with heresy.

Pretty timely today as well. But you'll see that we'll sing in this hymn, Though with a scornful wonder men see the Church so oppressed, yet nonetheless we pray and we're confident.

[64 : 26] And you'll see in the final verse, She on earth has union with God the three in one, we're in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

So let's stand and sing 640. Amen. The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ the Lord. She is His new creation by water and the Word.

From heaven He came and sought Him to be His holy bride.

With His own blood He bought Him and for Her life He died.

[65 : 38] In elect from every nation yet one o'er all the earth, her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one word, one holy name she blessed, our taste, one holy fruit, and to one hope she blessed, with every grace and truth.

O with us, born for wonder, let's see her soul oppressed, by stings of strength asunder, by heresies distressed.

Their saints, their watch, their keeping, their rivals up along, and soon the night of weeping shall be the horn of song.

In toil and tribulation and true love of her war, she wastes the constriction of peace forevermore.

Till with the grace and glorious her longing eyes are blessed, and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

[67 : 49] Then she on earth had union with all the three in one, and this big, sweet communion with those whose rest is won.

O happy ones and only, Lord, give us grace and peace, like them the meek and lowly, on thy way dwell with me.

So, church, hear the blessing of God. I'm going to use some words that the Apostle Paul uses later in this letter for our benediction. Now, may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Amen. Amen.