

3.15.20 ~ **1Thessalonians 2:13-20**,

Paul's Love for the Believers in Thessalonica.

Two weeks ago, I shared with you several of the metaphors used in Scripture for those who servant-lead the Church of God: **1Corinthians 4:1-2**, steward; **1Timothy 2:7**, preacher; **2Timothy 2:2**, teacher; **1Peter 2:16**, slave; **1Peter 5:1-4**, shepherd.

In **1Thessalonians 2:7** Paul writes, "we were among you, as a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her own children," but then in **verse 11** he says, "we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children."

Paul loves the believers in Thessalonica, and in **1Thessalonians 2:12**, Paul says he came exhorting, encouraging, and imploring them, "so that [they] would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls [them] into His own kingdom and glory."

Thessalonica was located just W of the Aegean Sea, along the well travelled Egnatian Highway, which ran east and west between Greece to Turkey. Going north from Thessalonica, all Europe could be reached with commerce, and every kind of philosophy and teaching (most of which, at that time, were false and/or satanic in nature). Thessalonica thrives today, and is said to have one of the oldest Christian churches still in existence.

Read 1Thessalonians 2:13-20... Paul can't help but again give thanks for the Christians in Thessalonica, as he did already in **chapter 1:2**, "We give thanks to God always for all of you." Paul says, "when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God which also performs its work in you who believe."

As Paul previously mentioned in **1Thessalonians 1:6**, "They received the Word," i.e., their hearts were cultivated and ready to receive the truth of God in Christ for salvation. The phrase in **2:13**, "you received from us," cites the fact that they listened to, heard, and accepted the Word of God being preached to them as if the message came from God through the apostles.

Paul says, what he preached **2:2**, is "the gospel of God," again in **2:8**, "the gospel of God," and in **2:9**, "the gospel of God." Paul's preaching wasn't his own thoughts, nor was it something he had received from someone else; this was the sovereign, inerrant, infallible, eternal Word of God breathed out from and originating with God (cf. 2Timothy 3:16).

In Acts 8: 14, "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God they sent them Peter and John." Those preachers who went out to Samaria, including Philip, didn't preach their own message; they preached the Word

of God, from God. In Acts 13:44, "The whole city assembled to hear the Word of God," from Paul and Barnabas.

Notice that God's Word (last part of **1Thessalonians 2::13**), "performs its work in you who believe," i.e., when you hear, believe, and respond to God's message with your heart, that is a definite act of saving faith. **Romans 10:17** says, "Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of Christ," but verses **10:9-10** declare, "You must believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord," in order to be saved.

So, those who genuinely repent and believe in Christ have the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in them.

Let me be very clear that God's Spirit doesn't work in the lives of unbelievers. The only thing the Word will do in an unbeliever is convict them of rejecting Jesus Christ.

God's Spirit performs His work in us: He prospers us (Joshua 1:8), "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." He restores our soul (Psalm 19:7), "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." He warns and rewards us (Psalm 19:11), "By them Your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward." He counsels us (Psalm 119:24), "Your testimonies also are my delight; They are my counselors." He strengthens us (Psalm 119:28), "My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Your word." He makes us wise (Psalm 119:98-100), "Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts." He guides us (Psalm 119:105), "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." He revives us (Psalm 119:154), "Revive me according to Your word." He blesses us (Luke 11:28), "Blessed is the one who hears the Word of God and obeys it." He purges us (John 15:3), "We are cleansed by the Word." He sets us apart (John 17:17), "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." He teaches, reproveth, corrects, trains, and equips us (2Timothy 3:16), "All Scripture is inspired [breathed out] by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." He saves us (1Peter 1:23), "You have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God." He grows us (1Peter 2:2), "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." The Word performs Its work in us.

See **1Thessalonians 2:14...** The Thessalonians had become imitators of the churches of God and Christ Jesus in Judea, in that they had suffered at the hands of their own countryman, as did those believers in Judea.

The original church in Jerusalem was persecuted. Stephen was martyred in Acts 7, after which persecution broke out, led by Saul (Paul), against the followers of Jesus, and so the churches were scattered. Just like the Judean church was persecuted by the Jews, the Thessalonians underwent the same kind of suffering. In fact, we are told in **Acts 17:5**, "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar." The Jews got people all stirred up into mob, and then hired some Gentile thugs in the market place to beat up those who were believing in Christ.

So, in **1Thessalonians 2** Paul is expressing his joy for these believers who genuinely heard and responded to the gospel of God, and although they are a very young church, they are being persecuted like the much older and more established churches in Judea.

Paul says the new believers in Thessalonica are already enduring persecution by the unbelieving Jews.

1Thessalonians 2:15-16, who "both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost."

The Jews persecuted Christ and the prophets, and hinder the Gentiles from being saved, in by doing so they heap judgment upon themselves forever!

In less than 40 years from the death of Jesus Christ, Jerusalem was devastated, the temple was torn down, 1,100,000 Jews were put to death by the sword and those who survived were taken as slaves for the Roman Empire and/or sold as slaves on the world market.

Those who do not please God by continuing to reject Christ as Lord; those who hinder the proclamation of the gospel of God, will indeed suffer the ultimate wrath of God, being condemned to an eternal hell where they will be tormented day and night, and there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth, forever and ever (cf. Matthew 5:18; Revelation 20:10).

John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

See **1Thessalonians 2:17-20...** "Having been taken away," literally means, "to be orphaned," "to be torn away from." Paul felt like he had been ripped out of the arms of the believers in Thessalonica. He didn't want to leave.

Remember in **verse 7** he had talked about himself as a nursing mother who cares for his children, and in **verse 11** as a father who encourages, exhorts, and implores his children. He had that parental heart and now he feels like a parent who has been torn away from his children.

That's the feeling Paul has, even though he hadn't known them very long, in fact only a few weeks; and yet, he loved them so deeply, and was now suffering their loss, like a shepherd without his sheep, a mother or father whose children had been forcibly taken from them.

Paul wanted to be with them, to see their faces, so he says in **verse 18**, "we wanted to come to you," to know how you were doing.

Paul said "we" in **verse 17** and "we" in **verse 18** (meaning Paul, Timothy, Silas), but now he says, "I, Paul, [wanted to come to you] more than once."

Paul had sent Timothy back, but he wanted to go, to be with them, he loved them and would no doubt give his life for them, just as Jesus gave His life for all of us.

Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Philippians 1:21-26, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again."

Why didn't Paul go back to see them? **1Thessalonians 2:18**, "Satan hindered us." More than once Paul had tried to return, but Satan had kept him from doing so. We don't know what happened or how he was held back, perhaps, because this little church had so quickly matured and were promoting the gospel of Christ, maybe Satan was afraid of what would happen if Paul was allowed to return and spiritually energize these believers even more. Or maybe Paul would have been killed by those who had persecuted him there. Only God knows, but these believers continued to grow whether Paul was there or not, and they represent what a church should look like and act like in service to the Lord.

Satan opposes God's people, and especially those on the front lines of ministry, those who take a bold stance to proclaim the message of Christ: crucified, resurrected, and coming again.

Read 1Thessalonians 2:19-20... These are marvelous verses, pregnant with meaning and overflowing with encouragement exhortation to make a difference for Christ.

Paul tells the believers in Thessalonica that they are his hope, joy, and crown [lit. the *victor's crown, the wreath that is placed on the head of the winning contestant in an olympic event*] of exultation! Ultimately Paul is talking about an eternal reward from an eternal event, for he says, "Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."

What does Paul mean? Well, he wrote something similar to the Corinthians believers (**2Corinthians 1:14**) "We are your reason to be proud as you also are ours in the day of our Lord Jesus." I believe that is synonymous with (**1Thessalonians 2:19**), "in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming." Paul is saying, "I'm going to boast about you in the day of the Lord Jesus, as His coming, when I see Him, you are going to be what I boast about!"

Listen! When you and I get to glory, we aren't going to crowns to put on our glorified heads, our crowns will be the very presence of the people there who we had the joy to proclaim the message of Christ to, whether we planted the seed, or watered, or harvested, i.e., the people whose lives were influenced by our words, our example, and our prayers.

Our reward, Paul is saying, is from the Lord's own recognition, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master." For the faithful who obey, honor, and serve the Lord with their lives, in order to bring people to the knowledge of Christ, this is the victor's crown.

Revelation 22:12, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

I believe the time of rewards is after the rapture of the church, at the same time period as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. So, at the time of the rapture when Jesus comes, there will be a great time of rewards in heaven, and it will be Jesus Christ bringing all those who had already died in the faith with Him.

What will be your most glorious joy at the rapture, aside from being in the very presence of the Lord? While you are considering that, look again...

1Thessalonians 2:19-20, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."

Paul emphatically says, "You are our hope and joy and crown in the presence of our Lord." Paul was motivated by his anticipation of the Lord's return, although he loved the believers, he loved the Lord more; but he anticipated the Lord's return,

when all believers would be together forever. Paul's greatest joy was his love for Christ, and his also his love for those who belong to Christ.

May we all imitate Paul's example by showing our love for the Lord, by the love we continue to express toward all those who belong to God.

John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Pastor Mike ° ° ° >'(((><