

4.26.20 ~ **1Thessalonians 3:1-10, Picking Up Where We Left Off...**

As we begin today, I am reminded that it has been five weeks since we were last in our study on 1Thessalonians, back on March 15. Since then I did a couple of sermons about trusting God and finding comfort in His Word, then it was Palm Sunday and then Easter Sunday, and then one more sermon on the Father of Mercies and God of All Comfort.

God is good, all the time; all the time, God is good. That is a very catchy truism, but we all know that God is not just, "good all the time," He is exceedingly compassionate, kind, loving, merciful, faithful, and He will see us through this time of trouble, tribulation, and affliction, just as we are reminded in His Word (**Psalm 46:1**), "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

These past five weeks, with the COVID-19 Pandemic, have been chaotic, confusing, and very disconcerting for all of us, e.g., mandates to shelter at home, the need for continual hand washing and/or hand sanitizer use, the wearing of masks when out in public, and the order for non-essential stores and businesses to be put on operational hold.

Let's turn our attention to **1Thessalonians 3:1-10...** Paul is using the connecting word "therefore," which links us to the last part of chapter 2; and since it has been five weeks since we were there, we will first revisit the last few verses of chapter 2, in order to get the context for what we just read in chapter 3.

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 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 then he says, "I, Paul, [wanted to come to you] more than once."

Paul sent Timothy back, but really, he wanted to go, to be with them, he loved them and would 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 exactly what happened or how he was held back, only God knows, but the believers continued to grow whether Paul was there or not.

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.

In **1Thessalonians 2:19-20** Paul tells the believers in Thessalonica that they are his hope, joy, and crown of exultation [lit. the *victor's crown, the wreath that is placed on the head of the winning contestant in an olympic event*]. But Paul is talking about an eternal reward, 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, when you and I get to glory, we aren't going to have crowns on our heads, but 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.

It is the Lord's own recognition and reward that we seek, as Jesus says (**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,” (**Matthew 25:34**), “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Paul's greatest joy was his love for Christ, and then his love for those who belong to Christ. Jesus said (**John 13:35**), “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Back to **1Thessalonians 3:1-4...** Paul longed to be with the believers in Thessalonica, but it was just too dangerous for him to go, so he sent Timothy. Timothy was Paul's dearest friend and his fellow missionary, and in fact, Paul had sent Timothy as his representative to several of the churches he had founded (cf. **1Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19-23**).

Paul considered Timothy his a son in the faith, his brother in the Lord and a fellow bond-servant of Jesus Christ (cf. **1Timothy 1:2; 2Timothy 1:2**). Paul is confident that Timothy would strengthen and encourage the believers' faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Paul's desire was for the believers in Thessalonica to grow stronger spiritually and not to be hindered or sidetracked by the afflictions and tribulations that

happened to him, as he served Christ, and would eventually happen to all of them, just as he had earlier told them and would later write to Timothy (**2Timothy 3:12**), "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Jesus told this to His disciples early in His ministry (**Matthew 5:11-12**), "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you"; and then at the end of His ministry (**John 15:18-19**), "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."

When Paul first arrived in Thessalonica, he had come from Philippi, where he and Silas had been jailed and beaten for proclaiming Christ (cf. **Acts 16:1-17:15**); in fact, Paul says in **1Thessalonians 2:1-2**, "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition."

Paul's sufferings on behalf of Christ were numerous (see **2Corinthians 11:24-29**), and Paul knew and proclaimed that the believers in Thessalonica, along with all true believers, would indeed suffer for their faith.

Back to **1Thessalonians 3:5...** Paul was concerned about the Thessalonians, so finally he sent Timothy to find out how they were doing, for Paul was fearful that perhaps Satan had deceived them or tempted them away from the truth of the gospel. Paul wanted to know that their belief in the Lord was real and that they were producing fruit, demonstrating their new lives in Christ.

See **1Thessalonians 3:6-8...** Paul is elated, for Timothy has brought back a report to him in Corinth, and it is all good news; for the Thessalonians have a strong faith that is bearing the fruit of demonstrative love for the Lord.

Timothy also reported that the believers were thinking kindly of Paul and they longed to see him again. Paul suffered many trials and tribulations, yet he finds great comfort in the report from Timothy about the Thessalonians' genuine faith.

Paul was pretty beat up physically and spiritually at this time, but the good news about the believers in Thessalonica standing firm in their faith, revived Paul, who is now feeling new life from Timothy's report, and is now exhorting the believers in Thessalonica to stand firm in the Lord, just as Paul would later encourage the believers in Corinth (**1Corinthians 15:58**), "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord."

See **1Thessalonians 3:9...** Paul is saying that any thanksgiving for the spiritual growth and expressed faith of the believers in Thessalonica, must go to God. Paul says he doesn't have the words to express his gratitude toward God for all the joy this report from Timothy has brought to him. Paul is so thankful, that he just doesn't have an adequate response in return for the blessings he has received.

See **1Thessalonians 3:10...** Paul is saying that he wishes he could be with them, face to face, up close and personal, in order to offer any instruction and/or encouragement they might need. But since he can't, he is praying for them constantly and earnestly, to be brought fully to maturity in Christ, just as he would later pray for the believers in Ephesus (see **Ephesians 1:16-21**).

Paul is a bond-slave of Christ, giving his life in service to the Church, for the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Paul deeply loves all those who belong to God through Christ, with a sincere and sacrificial love. He did not like being separated from his dear brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those who were new in their faith, for he was a caring and protective shepherd.

It is my sincere prayer that we, God's children, brothers and sisters in Christ, belonging to the household of God, will seek to serve the Lord with the same passion, purpose, and priority expressed through the life and the words of Paul: **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."

I genuinely understand Paul's concerns and his deep love for the church. I pray that this message will encourage you toward love and good deeds.

I miss all of you, and I'm sure that you miss having fellowship with your brothers and sisters in the Lord. So, until we meet again, it is my persistent prayer that the love of God, and the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all. Amen.

Pastor Mike

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