

I Thessalonians

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1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Vss. 1-5

- At the end of Chapter 2, Paul shares how he desperately wanted to return to Macedonia because he was dying to know how the churches were, given how much turmoil was going on around them when he left. He states that Satan had prevented his return, but does not elaborate as to how. All this was only adding to his anxiety over the Macedonian churches, so before he left Athens, he sent Timothy back to Macedonia.
- Timothy's job was to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonian church. Timothy had been with Paul in Philippi and had seen first-hand how by being faithful no matter what the circumstances may be, God could and would do great things. It was also a growth opportunity for Timothy. Paul was entrusting the leadership of the new churches to him. Paul could move on to Corinth confident that sending Timothy on such a mission would be a blessing for the churches and for the young missionary.
- Paul reminds the church that he told them from the start that they were "destined" for trouble and that they were going to "suffer affliction". This would not make a great recruiting poster, but it was honest. Paul was always open and straightforward with the truth. Paul was challenging the status quo of both the Jews and the Greeks. Those two cultures had lived mostly comfortable side by side for generations with a "live and let live" attitude for each other. Paul was determined to turn that all upside down, taking on the Jews first and then the Greeks. He went after the failure of the Jewish Law and their failure to see Jesus as the Messiah. He went after the mental nonsense of Greek paganism and its gross immorality. It didn't take supernatural vision to see that they were destined to suffer affliction.
- When Paul's anxiety over what was happening in Macedonia became too much, he sent Timothy to discover how they were holding up out of "fear that the tempter might have tempted you and our labor would be in vain". Self-preservation is a powerful tool in the hands of Satan. Had the church taken the easy way out and turned back to the Jewish Law or to Greek paganism in order to stop the persecution? Paul knew that there had been others who had done so. Did the church collapse under the weight of persecution? Paul HAD to know!

Vss. 6-10

- But as tired and troubled as Paul was, the news Timothy brought to him was a far greater refreshment! Yes, the infant church had held up under the weight of persecution, but even more, their faith and love had grown and in fact they had been just as concerned for Paul as he had been for them!
- Because the Thessalonian church had performed beyond all of Paul expectations, he says that “now we really live!”. Indeed, the joy Paul and his friends feel is beyond their ability to express their thanks to God for all He has done for the Thessalonian church. So Paul will pray for the Thessalonians with a renewed energy, still hoping to return to them and finish the work that persecution had interrupted.

Vss. 11-13

- Paul closes this section by praying for three things.
- First, he prays that God will make his journey back north to Thessalonica possible. Now on the surface, going from point A to point B doesn't sound too difficult. But see two things here: a) Paul had already said that Satan had prevented him from returning to Macedonia, so clearly only God can make a way b) Paul doesn't just pray about the big things in life, but the everyday things as well. When all is calm, we often walk out the door with unspoken confidence that we can handle the day by ourselves. Paul had no such illusions. He knew he needed the power of God every moment of every day.
- Second, he prays the Thessalonians will fulfill Christ's command to love one another. In their church there were undoubtedly Jews, Greeks, and Romans. There were rich people and poor people. There were free men and there were slaves. Yet all were to come to the foot of the cross as equals, for all had sinned and come short of the glory of God. So they were to love one another as Christ commanded, for **nothing** demonstrates the presence of the Holy Spirit in a community like the power of God's love. For it is a power so great that none of the world's barriers can stand against it.
- Third, Paul reminds them of the ultimate “WHY”. We live as we live because it is the best life anyone could ever live. But our eye is always on Heaven. Life is short. Eternity is long. We live as we live, with Christ and for Christ, Christ in us and we in Him, so that we may live with Him together forever.