

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

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[0 : 0 0] The reading today comes from 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 17, through chapter 3, verse 5.

That can be found on page 846 in your Bible on the chair. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us.

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions.

For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass and just as you know.

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. This is the word of the Lord.

[1 : 3 2] Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, happy Mother's Day to all of you who are mothers.

And it's not only a week on the west side for mothers. There are also wedding bells ringing in our midst. And in six days' time, Paul and Nicole will be married.

And we look forward to your return. But we certainly hope that your week goes well and that your celebration is great. We'll be thinking of you on that great day.

Right? Won't you be? I'm sure some of you are making the trip there. Well, a couple of weeks ago, we noticed the question that became the occasion for the writing of the letter.

Will it last? And it was a question that was running through the mind of Paul, the church planting pastor.

[2 : 5 3] And after getting the initial work in Thessalonica underway, he was hurriedly rushed out of town. And he wondered, will it last?

You can even see a hint of that in the very final phrase of our own text today. Chapter 3, verse 5. And if you have a Bible near you, I'd encourage you to keep it open.

1 Thessalonians 2, 17 to 3, 5. He's wondering if there might have been labor on his end that turned in the end to be vain.

I just want to say that that is the question that pastors and church founding planters often go to bed with.

If you wonder, what's in the mind of the pastors when they sleep at night? This is the question. Will it last? There are so many things that can swamp the work of the gospel that Paul goes to bed at night.

- [4 : 09] The great apostle who spoke with such clarity, such boldness, such call and command, but on his own at bed at night, this was his enduring question.
- Will it last? Is all the work perhaps in vain? Will anything come of that which had begun?
- And so he picks up his pen. Really, he sent Timothy to inquire and to ease his own mind.
- Interestingly, the questions that the pastors have of congregational life are different than the ones the people have in congregational life.
- And in our own text today, it is primarily the question in the hearts of the people that begin to have voice in the letter.
- [5 : 10] And it's not, will it last? But it's, am I loved? Or, does he love me?
- Does my pastor love me? Does Paul love us? Does he love us?
- That make them wonder, does he love me? Am I loved? And those questions, don't they, don't even relate to their relationship with a pastor, but often your relationship with God.
- Does God love me? Does he know what I'm in the midst of? Does he see the heavy sledding of my life?
- The deep tracks? Does he know what I'm in the midst of the church? Really, that question is something that comes to us all throughout the course of life. And I think in our text, you're going to see that if those questions rise in your own mind and heart, am I loved?
- [6 : 40] First, am I loved by God? You'll see here that the heart of the pastor is to mirror and exemplify the loving reality of Christ.
- So that the congregation will be affirmed, reassured, built up, strengthened. There are things that begin to make you answer that, ask that question, aren't there?
- I think of three afflictions. Ever since they knew Paul, their knowledge of him had led them into many afflictions because of their relationship with him.
- Does he love me? I mean, look what I'm in the middle of. Ever since I signed on. Now, it's been nothing but a hard pull. Afflictions.
- Certainly, they appear in our text, don't they? The second thing that I think is a cause for this question, am I loved, was his absence.
- [7 : 49] He wasn't with them anymore. And when someone is away, you begin to wonder, are they actually concerned? And the third thing, of course, is the activity of Satan.
- All three of these factors are in the vein of our text. The afflictions that they were in the midst of, the absence of Paul himself, and the activity of the Satan.
- They sit upon a congregation and it begins to press down upon the soul. And when you go to bed at night, there are moments when you wonder, am I loved?
- There's a unique bond then that ought to be in place between pastor and people. And there are circumstances in life that can put that relationship on edge.
- It could be a harsh word spoken by the pastor at a particular time. That's certainly not the indication here in the letter. It could be the neglect of a word.
- [9 : 00] How come I haven't heard from him since he left? It could be many, many, many things.
- And when we begin to look at this letter then, we begin to see his response to this question. Am I loved? Verses 17 and 18.
- Paul reassures them of the depth of his affection for them. Take a look at it. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again.

But Satan hindered us. Those two little verses begin to reveal the depth of his affections for them.

And you see it evidenced in that little phrase of verse 17, but since we were torn away from you. The word torn away literally would mean orphaned.

[10:18] They didn't want to be away from them. He was orphaned from them. In the Greek, this term could refer either to the child who has been orphaned from their parents or the parent who, in a sense, had been orphaned by the pulling away of their children.

Now, which way Paul intended it, we don't really know. But we do know that it's at least the third and probably the fourth time that he has brought familial language to bear on his relationship with the people.

Do you remember back in 2.7, on Mother's Day, this is the text we want to hear, that Paul was like a nursing mother taking care of her children. This is his affectionate heart.

It's placed in the language of family. We saw earlier in 2.11, For you know how, like a father, I encouraged and exhorted you.

And interestingly, back in 2.7, there might be a third reference to this familial language, that of an infant. And if you look at the note on the word gentle, at the bottom of the page, some manuscripts read infants.

[11:33] And it's really the difference between whether the word here is *epioi* or *napioi*. Am I gentle or am I a child? And textually, there's good grounds to think that he actually says here in 2.7, We were like a child among you.

In other words, I was innocent. And I was also like a mother. And I was also like a father. And now he says, I am also orphaned.

I don't know if he could have chosen a metaphor that would do more to display his affection for them than this. Think of it even on Mother's Day.

How do you feel toward your children? Especially when they are absent from you or you from them. Or if they are in some difficulty.

There is not a mother here that goes to bed at night not thinking of the welfare of her children. And if they are in the midst of tough times in life, even more so.

[12:41] And Paul is quite aware that this little congregation, probably not the size of the West Side work when he left them. He wants them to know that, do I love you?

I was torn from you. Which, of course, brings us back to what it was that tore him from their presence. Acts 17. Remember the afflictions came.

He had been staying with Jason. The crowds began to be stirred up by the unbelieving Jews. They began to have this accusation against Paul that the men who would overturn the world have come here.

And they actually say in 17.10 that they had to get Paul and Silas out of town under the cover of darkness. And the phrase is, immediately.

So there was no time for him. There were people he didn't see. There were goodbyes he never said. There were notes that were never written. He had been in their midst just a short time, spending his life with them, laboring among them, ministering to them, teaching them.

[13:51] And then one day, men and women woke up and they said, where's Paul? He's gone. He had to go under the cover of darkness.

Really running for his own life. And then there were the wicked activities of Satan that began to swirl through those unbelieving people in Thessalonica.

And they began to ask questions subtly to those men and women over time. Well, you know, have you heard from him?

Well, you know, this about him. And they began to subtly attack him.

I think that's why this letter is filled with this phrase that Paul keeps using, for we know. I mean, look what he says in chapter 1, verse 5. He says, you know what kind of men we prove to be among you.

[14 : 55] Chapter 2, verse 1, for you yourselves know that our coming to you was not in vain. Chapter 2, verse 2, as you know. Chapter 2, verse 5, as you know.

Chapter 2, verse 9, for you remember. Verse 10, your witnesses about our conduct. Verse 11, for you know. All of this, even in our own text.

Chapter 3, verse 3. For you yourselves know. And at the end of verse 4, just as you know. It almost feels to me as if the word that's gone out in Thessalonica about Paul was prefaced with, well, you know, he's a big dude with big things to do.

You think he really cares about you? Well, you know, he isn't here. And Paul says, let me tell you what you already know.

That my absence from you was nothing less than a parent having recently been given a child.

[16 : 10] Having that child pulled from him or her. Orphaned. You know, it's a great thing to hear that from Paul, isn't it?

We think of Paul as the stern, you know, argumentative, strong, type A, never displaying his feelings kind of pastor.

Well, not so. Because he knew that the people were going to bed with the question, am I loved?

And he says, let me show you the depth of my love. Look, later in verses 17 and 18, he uses three words and then one repeated action to reinforce this metaphor of being orphaned.

The three words are right there. He says, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more. Here's the first one. Eagerly. That's demonstrating his affection for them.

[17 : 15] And with great desire to see you face to face because we wanted to come to you. And then here's the repeated action. I, Paul, again and again. Does my pastor love me?

He says, look, when I'm not with you, it is as if parents have been torn from children. I am eager for you, he reinforces it. Namely, there is a readiness of soul to be in your presence.

The word great desire is almost exclusively used in the rest of the New Testament to convey the negative feeling of lust.

And he uses that term here and he flips it all on his head. Do you want to know what I think of you? I am eager to be with you. I have a great desire to be with you.

In other words, there is an overpowering appetite in my soul for you. And then he says, I wanted to be with you.

[18 : 20] The word there is a will. It was within his will to come. And then he has the repeated action again and again. So what he says is, are you loved?

When I'm not with you, it's like a parent being pulled from their children. There is a readiness of my heart to be in your presence. There is an overpowering appetite in my soul for you. My very will moves for you.

And I tried again and again, multiplied effort, to get back to you. But Satan hindered us. Now we have no idea what the hindering was.

But he wants them to know that not only are there afflictions in his mind, not only is his absence in his mind, but he wants them to know that the activity of Satan also is a factor in why congregants are questioning the love of the pastor for the people.

Well, I love that. He moves on after showing them in verses 17 and 18 the depth of his affections for them.

[19 : 34] It's almost as if he just explodes with why he feels this way toward them. I mean, it almost just elevates in verse 19 and 20.

Four, what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus said is coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. This is why I feel the way I feel toward you.

Two things there. He's thrilled. When he thinks about them, he thinks about their standing when Christ comes. That's what he goes to bed thinking about in regard to his love for them.

He thinks about the day that that congregation will stand in the presence of God at Christ's coming. And he says in verse 19, For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

In other words, he sees their presence at Christ's coming as the one thing that consumes his thought. Their eternal standing. He says, in other words, paraphrase, I get so jazzed when I think about your presence when Christ comes.

[20 : 54] That's what motivates me. And then the second end of that, For you are our glory. And joy.

You know, you think of the glory that was bestowed upon the early Grecian Olympians. They would have a wreath that was placed on their head. And in a sense, that's the way it is for Paul.

When he says, you want to know how I feel about you? Not only do I want to see you standing in the presence of God, but when I consider myself standing there, you are my wreath.

You're why I ran. You're why I worked. I didn't do it for myself. I did it all for you.

And you're my glory. You're my wreath. What a great image. So what you see in the first half of 2.17 to 2.20 is the depth of his affections for them.

[22 : 02] Why he feels this way toward them. And then that leads him to go on in chapter 3, verses 1 through the beginning of 2a, his decision to send Timothy to them.

Chapter 3, Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind in Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ.

His decision to send Timothy. Notice there are two amplifying phrases on Timothy. He is a brother, and he is God's co-worker.

Again, there's a familial image, and then he connects him to the very activity of God. That Timothy is one who, like Paul, is working with God.

He is a co-laborer with God in the gospel of Christ. I mean, what great credentials. So he says, Look, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I was wondering every night, Will it last?

[23 : 04] I sent Timothy, who is a brother and a co-laborer in the gospel of Christ. There's something to this about pastoral ministry, because we are not always in the presence of one another.

And it's good to actually look someone in the eye. There are nights when my kids come home from school, and we all gather at the dinner table. They're all aware of this. And before I even pray, there are occasions where I say, All right, everyone look at me.

I want to look you in the eye. I want to look everyone in the eye. And they have to put up with me, because I'm the dad, and they can't eat until they do. And they all begin to look at me. And I patiently, and not quickly, I go around the table, from my left to the right, and I go around, and I look each one in the eye for a couple seconds.

I just pause and rest on them. Because that parental presence is so important. And Paul is basically saying, I couldn't stand it anymore.

I've been gone. And I sent Timothy to be my eyes, to be my presence. He is your brother. He is the co-laborer for God. Such was his decision to send him.

[24 : 23] And then the latter half of the text for today, the concluding point, 2b through 5, really answers the question, why he was so concerned about them.

So that's the way this little text unfolds. The depth of his feelings for them, followed in 19 and 20, with why he feels this way toward them.

His decision to send Timothy to them, followed with why he was so concerned about them. And his concern looks to be twofold.

First, he sent Timothy to them for their own benefit. Take again a look at verse 2. The reason he sent Timothy was to establish and exhort you in the faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction just as it has come to pass and just as you know.

[25 : 30] That is his first reason that begins to unfold why he was so concerned with them. He wanted to establish them and exhort them in the midst of afflictions that he knew were coming to them.

Now the word there, to establish, is really a word that would confirm someone or as it's translated in Romans, to strengthen someone.

I mean, they were under such horrific attacks in their own little community for their faith. He sent someone to strengthen them. That's why he was concerned for them.

And then the other word there, exhort, to exhort you really is to encourage you. It wasn't long ago that someone came to me and I'm looking forward to preaching this text today in the South congregation because so many of our people are presently, I don't know this congregation as well, but it's probably the same here.

I just don't know it. But there are so many in that congregation who have held the weight of this work for so long who in this very moment are under the press of incredible affliction, almost across the board.

[26 : 47] Someone said to me, what are you praying for in your congregation? How can I pray for your congregation? To me, it rolled off my lips without a second thought.

Pray that my people would be encouraged. That's what Paul is sending Timothy to do.

Because of the hard road, they're walking. And that, you're fortunate to have in Pastor and Mrs. Leyva, someone who weakly can look you in the eye and encourage you in the midst of the long pull.

To encourage you and to tell you, look, we never said it was going to be easy. Just as you know, and it's all come to pass, put your hand to the gospel work and guess what?

Afflictions will be there. Absence will trouble you. The activity of Satan is sure to find you. And I am here to love you. Or if I'm not, I'll send Timothy.

[28 : 17] The second reason I think he was so concerned for them really is the last phrase there in verse 5. He almost gives another here, for this reason. It seems to be a second reason.

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. He sent Timothy not only to establish them and to encourage them, but to inquire about their faith.

This is the phrase really that begins to unfold. Will it last? He wanted to know. He wanted to learn how they were doing in the difficulties of life.

And it was out of fear. And his fear was that the devil was going to steal seed. And that his labor would be in vain.

So the first reason he sends Timothy, it seems to me, is for their benefit. That they would be established and exhorted. The second reason seems to be for his own benefit. I gotta know.

[29 : 24] And what he found when Timothy came back, and we'll see it next week, was that the word that converted them was still at work in them.

which for him validated the lasting effect in that congregation. And so we come to that today.

And I want to close with two words of comfort to you. If you are wondering today, does God love me? Is there a pastor who would love me?

Is there a church who will love me? First of all, Christ promised not to leave you as orphans in the world. Isn't that beautiful?

While he is pulled away from us, torn away, it is only for a time, and in his absence, he promised before he left, I will not leave you orphans.

[30 : 27] John 14, 18, I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you in a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

And that day you will know that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you. And then he's asked a question by Philip and Philip's not sure what this means, that he's not going to be left as an orphan.

And Jesus tries to clarify him for him and he says, look, I'm going to send you the helper, the Holy Spirit. God will not orphan you in this world. He gives his spirit to dwell within you.

The confirming work that God is active in your life is already planted in your soul. Amen. And not only that, not only do I want to tell you Christ will never leave you in this world, I want you to know this, your pastor, your pastor on the west side loves you.

May you be strengthened in that word. In Christ's name, let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, the angst, angst, the angst, the angst,