

A Heart for the Churches

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 August 2013

[0 : 00] This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alfred, Georgia. It is our prayer that you will be blessed by the preaching of God's Word. If you would, turn your Bibles, turn with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, and we might get out a little early tonight, praise the Lord.

You guys get to watch the service down in Mableton, maybe. But before we get there, I would like to talk to you. We've been at church now for seven years, and we've seen a lot go through this church.

I think we have right now 19 missionaries out of our home church, and we just started another church in Mableton. That's pretty incredible, is it not? Not only have we started a church in Mableton, the Lord has used our church to help start a church in Peru, in the United Kingdom, in China, in Chile, and where else am I forgetting?

Africa, parts of Africa. Yeah, North Africa, I guess we helped start a church out in Africa, and Spain, and now Mableton. And today in this chapter, Paul talks, it's actually a story, and Paul is recounting, and he's telling his heart that he has for this church that he's planted down in Thessalonica.

And I would like to encourage you or challenge you, what is your heart? Do we have a heart for the churches? You see, if you were a farmer, and you were to plant a crop, you'd be pretty interested in how that crop turned out, would you not?

[1 : 22] If you were a businessman and you invested money, you'd be checking up on your money. There's nothing wrong with that. You want your investment to prosper. You want your investment to succeed.

When I was a, I guess I was a young man, 21 years old, my little brother was, he was raising calves for a 4-H project. He just became a freshman, and he had six bull calves. And he, it was part of a project for a school project, and every morning about 5 o'clock, he would go out there and he would get the bottle, and he'd put the formula in the bottle, and he would, you know, shake up the water in the bottle, and he would go out there and bottle feed each calf 5 o'clock in the morning.

Then once he got off from school about 3 o'clock, he would run out to the, up to the barn, and he would feed those calves again, and then again at night about 10 o'clock, he would feed the calves three times, he'd bottle feed them.

And he would change out the straw about at least once every two days. And just about every moment in his open, that was open in his calendar, he was always up there, he was always doing something. When they were sick, he was out there taking care of them.

You see, my brother invested something in there. And whether it was going to succeed or not, it was really, really crucial in his life. Much more than little cows, we just planted a church.

[2 : 33] You get that? We just planted a church. And we just wrote on a covenant. We just made a covenant with the people down in Cobb County and a covenant with the Lord that we were going to see this thing through and succeed.

And Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 3, we get the glimpse of a man's heart for a church he planted. So if you would, turn your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 3, and we'll read the entire chapter.

It's only 13 verses. We'll read the entire chapter. The Bible says, Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it would be good to be left at Athens alone. And sent Timotheus, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you and comfort you concerning your faith, that no man should be moved by these afflictions.

For yourselves know how that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that you should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass, as you know.

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I could no longer endure, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you and our labor be in vain.

[3 : 52] But now, when Timotheus, or Timothy, came from you unto us and brought us good tidings of your faith and your charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us and desiring greatly to see us as we to see you.

Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith. For now we live.

If ye stand fast in the Lord, for what thanks can we render to God again for you? For all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God.

Night and day, praying exceedingly that we might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith. And he ends with this prayer.

He says, Now God Himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men, even as we do toward you.

[4 : 55] To the end that He, the Lord, may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we come to You in prayer, Lord God, I ask that You would just make Yourself known through this text. Lord God, help us to learn from the life of Paul. and as he had a heart for this church in Thessalonica, Lord God, I ask that You would give us a heart for the church in Mableton.

That You would give us a heart for the churches in Atikipa. That You would give us a heart for the churches in Chile. That You would give us a heart for the churches in Northern Ireland and China and Spain and North Africa.

And Lord God, that we would be concerned about these people, Lord God, and we would be comforted and rejoice in their success. And Lord God, that we would pray.

Lord God, I ask that You would just do a work. And Lord God, I ask that You just be glorified in all that we say. In Jesus' name. Amen. I just got a text, just so you guys know. 73 in Mableton.

[6 : 04] 24 from Mableton. Praise the Lord. Amen. God's doing a work down there. The first thing that I see in this passage is that Paul has a deep concern for the church that he started and left in Thessalonica.

You see, Paul sacrificed his comfort. If you were to look at 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 1, the Bible says, Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it would be good to be left at Athens, say this next word with me, alone.

Did you get that? Paul was alone. Have you ever been alone? Do you remember what it felt like to be alone? When I moved down here in 2007 of January, I really wasn't alone.

I had some people with me, but I felt alone. I come from a small town. If you ever go through Loudonville, you realize it's not that big of a town. We have more cows than people. And when I came down here, it just looked like this big concrete jungle.

I've never seen it before. Every time we were in the house, we lived over at, where I guess where Brother Wayne Cook lives, I would talk to, I guess Jeremy was there, and Philip and Mark Tolson. And I said, hey guys, let's go to town.

[7 : 13] And they're like, what are you talking about? We're already in town. I was like, I'm sorry. I used to say that all the time. Hey guys, let's go to town. Because I live so far. I live 13 miles from civilization. Anywhere you go. Civilization, 13 miles. But I felt alone.

But Paul says in this, he says, he thought it was good to be left at Athens alone. You see, in Acts chapter 17, it tells us, it gives us a little more insight of what happens.

In verse 14, he says, immediately the brethren sent Paul away to go to where the sea, but Silas and Timotheus abode still there. Or there still. And they conducted Paul and brought them unto Athens and receiving the commandment unto Silas and Timotheus that they would come with all speed.

They departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. You see what happened with Paul was, is Paul said, I'm going to stay here at Athens.

I'm going to let Timothy and Silas go to you guys. And I'm worried about you. I'm concerned because I told you that tribulation and trials were going to come. And so I thought it was good that if I just stayed here in Athens, I would send Timothy down there.

[8 : 19] And Timothy, he's a good man. Think about this. Paul was staying in a place that was wholly given to idolatry. A place that was so full of idolatry, the Bible says, that it actually affected his emotions.

And after his emotions were affected, the Bible says he began to preach. He said, I've got to do something about these people. They're giving themselves to idols and they're worshiping demons and this is someplace I've never been before.

I don't know this. He wasn't in a Jewish synagogue. But he began to preach. And after he preached, he didn't get the response that he wanted. If you remember, if you know your Bible, they mocked him.

Very few accepted. Others said, yeah, we'll learn about this later. But Paul was at a place, a hostile place, a place where he wasn't used to. But why did he do that?

Why would he choose to be alone? Why did he say, it was good that I be left alone? Because can I tell you something? Paul had a heart for those in Thessalonica. And Paul said, trouble's coming.

[9 : 19] There's something that's going to happen over there and I need to send Timothy and I'm willing to sacrifice my own comfort. You get this? I'm willing to sacrifice my own comfort to establish them.

To establish them. It wasn't just about the location that Paul was at. But Paul made a choice to be alone. Who chooses to be alone?

Who chooses to be alone? The only reason why Paul was in that town alone and the only reason that he states in the story was because he was concerned. He had a deep concern for the church in Thessalonica.

Can I let you know that the only way you can be concerned for someone or something is to know what they're going through? Paul knew that these people were going to face some troubles.

And he was worried about them. If you look in verse 4, he says, For verily, when we were with you, we told you that you should suffer tribulation even as it has come to pass.

[10 : 22] And you know it. In verse 5 he says, For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor was in vain.

Paul says, when I was there, in the first part, in verse 1 he says, we can no longer bear, but in verse 5 he says, I can no longer endure it. I couldn't take it anymore. I was worried about you.

I needed to see what was happening. I needed to make sure that my investment that I put in you was going to give some type of returns. And so I sent the only comfort that I had, the only person that goes with me on this, the person who's like-minded, the person who I call my son, Timothy, unto you so you could be established.

Can I say that this is the lifestyle that Paul took? If you know in your Bible that later on in Paul's life, he will say things in 2 Corinthians, if you've got your Bibles, turn to 2 Corinthians 11, verses 28.

Paul says this, he says this in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 28, besides those things that are without, that which is, just so you know this, before this, this is the chapter where Paul talks about his tribulation, all the stuff he's been through.

[11 : 36] He talked about how many times he was beaten with a rod. He talked about how he was on a ship and it was shipwrecked and he was left in the sea for a day and a night. He talked about how he went on dangerous roads and how he was constant in fear of robbers.

He talked about how he was stoned to death almost one time. And so when he says those things were without, that's what he's talking about. He says, besides those things that I suffered in my flesh, the thing that bears on my heart, the things that I care upon, the things that I carry daily is what?

The care of all the churches. You see, Paul had a deep concern for the churches that he started. Do we have a deep concern for Mableton? Mableton? Does it bother us the thought of that church not making it?

Does it bother us the thought of the church in Dalian not making it? Do we have a concern? You see what I'm saying? Paul was a man of God and he had a heart for the churches.

Is there a concern in our life? You see, this was part of Paul's lifestyle. But I don't want to elevate Paul. I want to remind you, this was the same thing that Christ did.

[12 : 55] If you had your Bibles and you turned to John 17, you know that this is the prayer that Jesus makes to the Father. And Jesus makes this prayer and during this prayer He talks about the disciples and talks about the believers that God gave them and He asks that God would sanctify them and He asks that God would take care of them and He asks that God would keep them safe from the world and He asks that God would just be with them and make them one.

And in chapter 8 He says after He said those things He walked unto the disciples and about that time Judas and those men with torches were walking to Him and they were about ready to grab Christ and they were going to throw Him on a cross.

And you say, what's so big about that? And the time right before His crucifixion, what was Jesus Christ crying to the Father about? Oh God!

Please don't let me suffer these! Please don't let me suffer this horrible death! Yeah, He said that, but it wasn't right before. What was on His mind right before He went to the cross?

What was on His mind right before He was beaten until they didn't know whether He was a man or a woman? What was on His mind before they plucked His beard? What was on His mind? Can I tell you what was on His mind? It was the disciples.

[14 : 13] He had a deep concern. And it wasn't just the disciples. He said, for all those that believe. He was worried about you too. He had a deep concern. He had a heart for the people. In a moment where I would most worry about myself, in a moment where I would be praying for myself and I would be asking for strength, what did Jesus do?

He was concerned about someone else. Can I say that's my bad thinking? That's the world's way of thinking, thinking about yourself.

But the Bible's way of thinking is like this. Galatians 6.2 Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. The Bible's way of thinking is Romans 15.1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.

The Bible's way of thinking is not about myself. It's about others. You see, Paul didn't just worry, but his concern caused him to sacrifice. It's one thing to worry about it.

It's another thing to act on it. And sacrifice always means that you will have to go without. It was Paul's conscious decision. It's something that bothered him.

[15 : 35] Look what Paul said he was going through when Timothy returned back to Paul with news about the church in Thessalonica. In verse 7, he says, Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our, what?

Affliction and distress. Paul sent Timothy when he was enduring affliction and distress and the news about the church in Thessalonica, it comforted him.

Did you get that? During his time of need, during his time of affliction, during the time of distress, what is distress?

It's when I need some help. Who was Paul thinking about? I could no longer bear. I could no longer endure it. I couldn't forbear it. I had to send somebody back to Thessalonica.

I had to do something. I just wanted to know if you guys were going to stay the course. And the only way that Paul was able to bear such a sacrifice, and this is the way you do it, is he had to make the church's problems bigger than his own problems.

[16 : 49] In my life, I don't know about your life. In my life, that is incredibly difficult. For me to stop thinking about myself. For me to stop thinking about what's going on in my life.

To me to stop thinking about all the junk I'm dealing about. And to think about someone else, I'm going to be honest with you. I rarely do that. But Paul said, I couldn't endure it.

But Paul, during his time in affliction, he sent the one person that brought him comfort. And I want to remind you once again, he was dealing with junk. He was dealing with problems. There will be times in your life where you have to choose.

You have to make that decision. Is it my problems or someone else's problems? And if you want to do what is God-honoring, if you want to do what is God-like, you're going to have to choose them over yourself.

Vision Baptist Church, I just want to speak to you guys because we made a covenant with God. And you signed it. I don't make promises I don't intend to keep.

[17 : 58] I hope you do the same. But we are starting a new church today. And if we want to have a heart for our sister church, Vision Baptist Church of Cobb County, if we want to have a heart for them, if we want to love our missionaries, their problems become our problems.

Their problems become our problems. We sacrifice. We who are stronger, we help those that are weak in need.

We bear one another's burdens. We are concerned about them. We have to become deeply concerned for them. And that means sacrifice on our end.

That means we are going to have to think about them. And that means we are going to have to care about them more than ourselves. But Paul's heart for the church at Thessalonica, it wasn't just about all concern.

There was some joy. You see, joy came from this church. You see, Paul delighted in these people. Paul loved these people. When Timothy came back with the testimony of the Thessalonians, man, it brought excitement in Paul's life.

[19 : 19] It brought excitement in Paul's life. Why was that? Because the church was enabled to endure trials. The church was enabled to endure the temptation. They were real.

The investment that he made, it didn't fail. Do you get that? The investment he made, it didn't fail. He went out and he sowed the seed and he saw the plant come up and he had to leave when the sun came out.

You remember the story of the soils that Jesus came out? And when the sun came out, what happened to the plant? It withered away. But when the sun came out and the trials and the tribulations came and the thorns came out, it didn't choke out this plant.

It didn't wither away this plant. It didn't kill it. But it grew and it flourished. And when that happened, Paul rejoiced. He found comfort. He delighted in these people. Paul was not only excited, but think about all the emotions that were stirred up into him.

In verse 6 he says, But now when Timotheus came from you unto us and brought the good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us as we also to see you.

[20 : 21] Paul wanted to go see them. He probably wanted to hear the stories of how they endured the different trials and how they endured the different temptations and how they were able to get through and God gave them victory.

He wanted to probably go there and congratulate them. The pride of knowing that they passed such a huge test probably increased his desire for him to see them. You see, Paul, he prayed in verse 10, he says, Night and day, night and day, chapter 3, verse 10, night and day, praying exceedingly that we might see your face.

And it's no wonder. You see, this church, this church, this church that Paul started, this church that Paul had a part in starting, it was his glory.

It was his joy. It was his crown of rejoicing. In 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 19, the Bible says this, For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?

And this is what Paul says, Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye, church of Thessalonica, believers, believers of Thessalonica, you are my glory.

[21 : 39] And you are my joy. He loved these people. He loved these people. And to hear that these people, his church that God used him to start, had made a monumental step, only increased his delight in these folks.

It was like a father going to his son's football game and seeing his son make the game winning play. The year before last, my father and I, I was up in Ohio, and I went to watch the, I guess it was the game right before the state finals.

And I was at the old Olentangy High School, watching Middletown versus some place out in Akron. And Middletown gets up, and they began winning the game near the end, and there was like 16 seconds left.

And this team from Akron had the ball, and they were in the red zone. If you don't know what the red zone is, that means they're about ready to score, okay? And the quarterback rolled out, and they, I mean, it just came out of nowhere. This team just came back from nowhere, highly.

And I thought, I thought this Akron team was going to win. And this quarterback, this Akron quarterback rolled out, and he was through the ball, and out of nowhere, this Middletown defensive back came out and intercepted the ball and ran down the field, and he ran out the clock and he fell down.

[22 : 53] And everybody just erupted and started yelling. And out of nowhere, right from right behind me, some guy jumped up and started yelling. He says, That's my boy! That's my boy! That's my boy!

And everyone's like, Yeah, man, you can just think of the cold chills running down your back. But could you imagine when Paul got the news that the church that he started, that the church he started passed a test bigger than any football game would?

Could you imagine him thinking and thinking about those trials and about those different tests that they had to and they passed them? Could you think the pride and the joy and the comfort that came inside them?

Think about this. Think about your Bible. Okay? Think of all the different churches that Paul dealt with. And think how many of them fell to false teachers.

How many of them fell to false doctrine. And how many of them he had to call and he had to correct them. The church of Corinth. Paul ended up writing 2 Corinthians.

[23 : 58] And the most part of 2 Corinthians is him defending who he was. The apostle. He's defending his apostleship. And he's fighting against error. Think of Galatians and how he starts off the book of Galatians and he says, I marvel how so soon you guys are removed from the gospel.

But now, right now, he had a church that just survived an attack. And they still wanted to see him. Verse 6, But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, he brought us good tidings of your faith and charity and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us as we also to see you.

Oh, how Paul delighted in these people. Can I say when you delight in someone else's success, that means you can't be in competition with them? Paul not only was concerned about them, but he found joy in them.

And in order to do so, you can't be in competition with them. Does that make sense? This is one of the most hardest things I have to face in my life, is the success of another person.

It's like in my life, I don't know if this is true and yours. If I don't win, then I don't cheer. Right? If I'm not the hero, I don't care to praise.

[25 : 20] It is often so hard for me that if someone else gets the praise, then I don't really want to have any part of it. But for Paul, nothing could be further from the truth. Their success was his success.

Their failures was his failures. It was sink or swim and they were in it together. And that must be our attitude with this church that we're planting down in Mableton and across the world.

It must be that their wins are our wins. We can't be in competition and we can't be lethargic about this church plant. When they have a huge win, we rejoice. When they have a major setback, then we are there for them.

We need to have that type of attitude, that type of heart for Vision Baptist Cobb County like Paul had for Thessalonica. You see, Paul was comforted.

He gave thanksgiving and joy came through their success. In verse 7, therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith.

[26 : 25] For now we live, verse 8, and if ye stand fast in the Lord, for what things can we render to God again for you? For all the joy we're with, we joy for your sakes before God.

Paul was dealing with his own problems when he heard what happened in Thessalonica and it comforted him. The church of Thessalonica with their win brought comfort, thanksgiving, and joy to Paul.

We need to fall in love with those people in Mableton. We need to rejoice when they succeed. We need to have a heart for Cobb County. We need not only to be concerned for them, but we need to rejoice in their wins.

Right now, it's a huge win. 73 people, 24 people from the county. That's incredible. But a reason why I believe that Paul was able to have a deep concern and he was able to avoid that competition and have that joy is because he practiced something that is overlooked, but it's extremely essential character.

It's one of the most extreme characteristics of a Christian. See, Paul prayed for him. In verse 10, the Bible says, night and day, praying exceedingly that we might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.

[27 : 42] Paul's prayers was not like mine. I need to be a man of prayer. Paul said this, he said, night and day, I prayed for you guys. What Paul is saying here is he says, you consumed my thoughts and I prayed for you all the time.

When it was in the morning, I was praying for you. When it was at midnight, I was thinking about you and I prayed for you. He actually says this in 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 2. He says, we gave thanks to God always for you, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith.

This was work for Paul. These prayers were work. It was a discipline that he learned. Paul said exceedingly.

He prayed exceedingly. Night and day, he prayed exceedingly. This wasn't, I'll pray for you brother and then go on with your day.

This is what Paul was doing was why Philip and Stephen and those five other men in Acts 6, you guys remember the deacons or what we call the deacons, the servants that were created to serve the tables.

[28 : 57] That was the reason why they were chosen for that position. So the apostles could be continually given to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Paul knew that if this church was going to stand and mature, then it had to be a work of God.

night and day, verse 10, night and day, praying exceeding that not only we might see your face, but perfect, mature that which is lacking in your faith.

What better way to make a petition to God than through prayer? What better way than going boldly before the throne and asking God for grace and mercy for someone else? Remind you, the Bible says you have not because you ask not.

If any changing is going to be done, it must be a work of God. Prayer shows that we must rely on God to do a work. Prayer demonstrates to us that we have no power in this.

But it's God that's doing the one, He's the one that's doing the working. Prayer majors on God and it minors on us. And in the end, Paul ends this lengthy introduction of 1 Thessalonians with this prayer.

[30 : 17] I want you to listen to his prayer and what he prays for. In verse 11, he says, Now God Himself and our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men even as we do toward you.

to the end, He may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God even our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all saints.

Some questions. Who's going to increase the Thessalonians' love? In verse 11? Or verse 12? Who's going to increase the Thessalonians' love?

Who is going to establish their hearts in Thessalonica? Who is going to make them become unblameable in holiness? It's all God.

We must become people of prayer. If we want to see God do a great work in the lives of people here in Alpharetta, in Cobb County, in Georgia, in Atlanta, and across the world, we must become people of prayer.

[31 : 30] How foolish to think this. I'll just give some money. Or the fact that I'll just go and give my time.

Or I'll send my pastor down there and believe that that's actually going to do something if we're not honestly and earnestly and fervently praying that God would do a work that only He can do.

Paul realized that. You want to know how to get a heart for a church? Start praying for them. Jesus says this. He says, those who spitefully use you, your enemies, and those who persecute you, you know what I want you to do?

I want you to pray for them. Because when you pray for them, you begin to love them. How could Paul go into a town and he preached the gospel in a synagogue and the Jewish people there basically run them out and be the ones that cause him to trouble the most?

And Paul, yet Paul in Romans chapter 9 says this, I wish myself I could be a curse for those people. How could he have a heart for those people? How could he have a heart for those people?

[32 : 47] I'll tell you how. How? He prayed for them. How can we have a heart for people in Vision Baptist, Mableton, or Cobb County when we don't even see them? Are you praying?

Are you asking God to do something great and big? And we've got to be concerned about them. We've got to rejoice in them, but most of all, we've got to be praying for them. Man, we've got to major on it.

I was putting up, and I'll end with this story, and this is not to make someone big here in this room, but I just love this story. I was putting up those world evangelism today's on Brother Gardner's blog.

And Brother Gardner used the story of a man, and he prayed for a country, and he had this map of this country in his office, and he prayed for it every day. I think it was like a couple years that went by.

This man was praying that the Lord would send forth laborers, and God just did that. He sent two missionaries there. He sent two missionaries there. He sent two missionaries there.

[33 : 55] Was it the money? Was it the time? That was God working through our prayers. We want God to do something great in Mableton, and here, and around the world.

We're going to have to become people of prayer. Heavenly Father, as we become to You, Lord, right now, Lord, I see my deficiencies.

I see where I don't care about people, and I care about myself often too much, and I see where I don't like to rejoice in other people's success, Lord. Lord, help me become a man of prayer. Help me to pray for people, and change my heart like You did these people in Thessalonica.

Let people see my faith, and rejoice, and be comforted, because they know that You did something in my life. Lord, give me a heart for the church that's going on down there in Mableton.

Give me a heart for the church that's going to be planted in Thailand. Give me a heart for the church that's going to be planted in Barcelona, Spain. Give me a heart for all of our missionaries and their churches.

[35 : 04] Give me a heart for vision. Help me become a man of prayer. Lord, I give You all the glory and all the praise. This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alfredo, Georgia.

For more information, log on to www.visionbaptist.com where you can find our service times, location, contact information, and more audio and video recordings.