

Series: 1 Thessalonians

Title: The Glory and Joy of Christ's Servants

Text: 1 Thess 2: 17-20

Date: Jan 19, 2023

Place: SGBC, NJ

1 Thess 2: 17 would have been a good place to start chapter 3 and continue it to verse 20 of the next chapter. For time sake, we will look at verses 17-20.

1 Thessalonians 2: 17: But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. 18: Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. 19: For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20: For ye are our glory and joy.

The apostle was especially attached to the brethren at Thessalonica. He said, v8: "*So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*" (1 Thess. 2:8.) This is the love God puts in the heart of his servant for those to whom we preach. It is not natural. This was not from Paul being around brethren for a long time. He only preached three sabbath days in the temple.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the *baser sort* of the people and persecuted Paul out of Thessalonica to Berea (Acts 17: 5). Then the persecutors came to Berea and persecuted them to Athens. But they did not take love out of Paul's heart for his Thessalonian brethren. Paul said in verse 17, "*But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, NOT IN HEART...*" This love is of God.

Subject: The Glory and Joy of Christ's Servant

Proposition: Those Christ calls to faith through the preaching of the gospel are the glory and joy of Christ's servant because Christ is the glory and joy of his servant.

CHRIST'S GLORY IN TAKING PAUL AWAY

1 Thessalonians 2: 17: But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

We see Christ's glory in Paul being taken from them. We know from other scriptures that Paul saw Christ's glory in this, too. This was the spirit the Lord Jesus created in Paul for his Thessalonian brethren, as well as for those in every place who Christ called through Paul's preaching. Paul loved them. It is like the love of a father for his children. But that is natural love. This love is greater. It is of God. It is spiritual. This love was in Paul because it is in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ that Christ puts into the hearts of his people.

"*But we, brethren, being taken from you...*" The unbelieving Jews persecuted Paul from Thessalonica. It was not Paul's choice. But Paul and Silas were helpless to stop this. Yet, Paul's hope and joy and rejoicing was that this had happened to Christ. It did not stop Christ from accomplishing our salvation. In fact, it is how Christ accomplished our salvation.

The unbelieving Jews persecuted Christ. Christ was taken from us. But it was Christ laying down his life for his people. It was Christ willingly giving himself to be persecuted in the room and stead of his people. Paul knew this. He knew that he and Silas being *taken from these brethren* was Christ ruling over them to send Paul to another place. It was not Paul's choice but Christ's. Christ being taken from us was according to the eternal purpose of God the Father. By it, our Substitute fulfilled the Father's purpose. He accomplished the salvation of his people thereby. He purged our sin on the cross and made us righteous by being taken away.

So Paul had this hope in the Lord Jesus, that he was taken away, only "for a short time", "*But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time...*" Paul's confidence in Christ is our confidence. His hope is our hope. Paul's joy and glory is our joy and glory. Christ was taken from us only for a short time. Paul's hope

was that he was taken from the Thessalonian brethren only for a short time. Paul comforts his brethren with this. We have hope Christ will see us again in person soon. Paul's hope was to see these brethren again soon.

This is the love God puts in the heart of his servant. Christ has only parted from us for a short time. Either he will bring us to him or he will come back for us. But either way our life is a vapor. Paul knew if he did not see them in this life then he would see them in a short time, as verse 19 says, "*in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming.*"

This was Paul's heart. They were only separated in bodily presence, not in heart. Verse 17, "*But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart,...*" The bodily presence of Paul and Silas was separated from their Thessalonian brethren, but not their heart. The apostle Paul was with them in spirit. He always remembered them, always prayed for them. Like a father's heart for the child he is separated from. He said the same to the Colossians,

Colossians 2:5: For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

This is the love and hope, and joy and glory of Christ's servant because this is so of our Lord Jesus toward all his people right now. Our Lord's bodily presence is not with us. But the Lord Jesus is present in spirit, even more than Paul was with his brethren. The Lord Jesus is really present with his people.

The word Paul used for "taken from you" is orphaned. Paul felt like he left them orphans. But Christ was with them and with Paul in spirit, though departed in body. Christ used the same word when comforting his disciples,

John 14: 18: I will not leave you comfortless [orphaned]: I will come to you. 19: Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. 20: At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

Though Christ is not with us in body, he is present in spirit with us. He is with his people all over the world in every age. That is one reason he sent Paul away. It was to show these Thessalonians that Christ is their Savior, not Paul. Christ was present. The same is true of us.

ENDEAVORING BUT UNABLE

1 Thessalonians 2: 17: But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. 18: Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

Paul endeavored the more abundantly to see their face. He had a great desire to see them in person. Paul's heart longed for them. His affections were strong towards them. He made great effort endeavoring to see their face with great desire. With earnestness and diligence he tried to come to them again and again.

"*But Satan hindered us.*" Satan is real. He hates the preaching of the Gospel. Satan hates brethren to be in fellowship. His desire is to divide us.

Spurgeon said, "Satan attaches far more importance to godly communion than we do."

Satan did not want Paul strengthening these brethren in the gospel of Christ. The devil's devices are to make us hold grudges and be unforgiving. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth concerning those the Lord had chastened and granted repentance. He exhorted them to forgive and comfort and confirm their love, even as Paul did in the person of Christ. Why?

2 Corinthians 2: 11: Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

We are no match for Satan. The only way to resist him is steadfast in the faith. That means we must cast all our care on Christ, trusting Christ to deal with the devil on our behalf. The devil hindered Paul but the devil cannot hinder the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus and the devil are not in competition. Worldly religion

preaches that sometimes the devil wins, sometimes Christ wins. They say Christ cast a vote, the devil cast a vote and it is up to you to cast the deciding vote. Not so! On the cross, the devil bruised our Lord's heel, only by God's eternal decree, only by God's sovereign permission. He only did what God determined before to be done. But on the cross Christ bruised the devil's head. Our Substitute put away the sin of his people and took away the devil's ammunition. The Captain of your salvation has completely defeated satan. Christ won that victory for you who are his.

Therefore, satan only hindered Paul by the permission of our Sovereign Savior. The devil can only do what Christ our God gives him permission to do. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he MAY devour." (1 Pet 5: 8). The devil had to have the Lord's permission to afflict Job. The Lord only permitted it to show us the Lord's strength in preserving his child in the worst of suffering.

Likewise, the devil had to have Christ's permission to hinder Paul. But the Lord used the devil for Paul's good. Christ gave the devil permission to buffet Paul to keep Paul from being puffed up due to the abundance of revelations God had given him--"*a messenger of satan to buffet me.*"

So in our text, the devil hindered Paul from returning to his brethren at Thessalonica because Christ worked it for their good. The Lord permitted this to make Christ their Strength and Consolation rather than Paul. It was for Paul's good and for the good of the brethren at Thessalonica. When the devil buffets you and me, it is Christ using the enemy for our good.

But the devil can do nothing to hinder the will and purpose of God. He hindered Paul from Paul's will but it was God's will for Paul not to return to Thessalonica, else God would have brought him there. God put Paul in Athens because it was God's will to preach the gospel there. The devil cannot hinder our Savior from working his will.

Brethren, look to Christ! We only resist the devil by faith in Christ. "*Resist the devil and he shall flee from you.*" Christ has conquered the devil. He shall bruise satan under our feet shortly.

INCREASED LOVE

1 Thessalonians 2: 19: For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20: For ye are our glory and joy.

In all this, our Lord increased the love and hope in the heart of Paul for these brethren and in their heart for him.

They were Paul's joy and crown of rejoicing in that Paul was used of Christ to preach the gospel to them through which Christ saved them. Christ's saints are his joy and crown of rejoicing, too! That should give us great hope in Christ's return. We are trophies of his grace! He purchased us. He will come again for us.

But Christ was Paul's hope of salvation, his joy, his crown of rejoicing, his glory. Christ was the same in the Thessalonian saints. He is the same to us. Their hope, and ours, is that through the blood and righteousness of Christ, we have been redeemed and quickened to life.

Therefore, Christ shall return and bring us to glory. That is our hope. Our hope is a confident expectation that Christ our Righteousness shall return and conform us to him in perfection in righteousness to be with him forever. The same is true concerning Joy. Christ is our Joy and our Glory. Soon our Lord shall return and we shall be in the presence of our Lord bodily and behold him face-to-face at his coming.

John 16: 19...[the Lord Jesus told us]...A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?...22: And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

Paul's hope and joy was that he expected to see his brethren again, if not in this life, at the coming of the Lord. "*Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*" The hope and joy and glory of God's preacher is to see those called through his preaching in the presence of our Lord at his coming. It is to know the Lord truly saved them. It is to know Christ preserved them unto the end.

Four things rejoiced Paul's heart. God's ministers know this because it is what rejoices the heart of all Christ's messengers.

One, to see the power and glory of God manifest in saving and calling his people.

Two, to see Christ exalted in his person and work by these brethren. Their being called out was the result of the redemption Christ accomplished for his people. Paul's joy in these brethren was beholding them exalt Christ as they gloried in Christ being their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

Three, to see that they, as sinners, were truly brought to faith in Christ and saved eternally. The Spirit of God regenerated them and preserved them in faith. They were sinners saved by grace beginning to end. It is the joy of Christ's preacher to see God's saints persevere in faith through every kind of trial.

Four, this was joy because it was evidence to Paul from the Lord that Paul was truly the servant of God and apostle of Jesus Christ. By calling out these brethren through his preaching, and keeping them, the Lord blessed Paul, strengthened him, encouraged him, filled him with joy and increased his hope in Christ. *"That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain" (Php 2: 16).*

By Christ making them continue steadfast in the faith when persecuted, Paul was convinced he would rejoice when Christ comes again because he would see them all gathered at Christ's feet with him. That is how they would be Paul's *"crown of rejoicing"*. It was because of what the Lord had done for them and in them. He gloried in God's grace to them all. He gloried that Christ saved them. He gloried that they were the trophies of God's grace. Paul gloried that they were the lawful captives Christ had delivered from the devil.

Paul was not saying he expected Christ to reward him for preaching the gospel. Christ was Paul's joy and glory. Christ was Paul's only Righteousness. Paul had nothing to glory in concerning their conversion. He planted, another watered, but it was God who gave the increase. He knew he was nothing and Christ was all.

But it was an honor given to Paul by Christ to serve Christ by serving them. Paul knew this. It was an honor to Paul to be given the privilege by the Lord to preach Christ to them. That is the honor Christ's messengers stand amazed at!

And Paul looked forward to giving Christ an account of them with joy and not with grief. It will be grief to give account to the Lord in that day that we preached Christ but some rejected Christ, rejected us and departed. But the joy is in those Christ saved unto the end. That is the glory and joy of Christ's servants. It is to behold Christ save those to whom he ministers and gather them up at the last day. Paul would even rejoice even in the brethren that Christ would call through these Thessalonian brethren preaching the gospel. Those called through these Thessalonians would be like Paul's grandchildren. That is the preeminent sense of the word when scripture says, *"Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers" (Pro 17: 6).*

Members of the church should get this point: the brethren felt the same way toward Paul and the other ministers of Christ. "As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also *are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor 1: 14).*

The reason this is true is because we are one in Christ with Christ in us. Paul's joy and rejoicing and glorying was Christ in whom they would have boldness in the day of judgment. Their rejoicing was Christ in whom Paul would stand. The love Christ puts in the heart between brethren is due to each of us being in Christ and having Christ in us. Our common hope is to be found in Christ's righteousness alone, not having any of our own. Our glorying and rejoicing is in Christ who did all the saving in each of us.

Philippians 4:1: Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, *my* dearly beloved.

Amen!