

Lighthouse Bible Church

March 29th, 2015

1st Thessalonians 2: 17 – 20 *Scripture Reading* **Philippians 1: 1 - 11**

‘Away in presence but not in heart’

Stand – Read – Pray

As we finish up chapter two of 1st Thessalonians we have seen so far that Paul has had to defend his life and ministry to the church at Thessalonica because of some false accusations that had been made against him in Verses 1 – 6.

We then saw, in Verses 7 – 12, how much Paul loved the people of the church at Thessalonica. He loved them like a nursing mother loves her children and like a father who instructs his children. Paul reminded them of their time together for that short time and how they labored and toiled and imparted not only the gospel but their own lives for them because they had become so dear to them.

He ended up reminding them that they lived devoutly, justly and blamelessly among them, as they well knew and wanted them to live the same way by walking worthy of God.

The Paul shared in Verses 13 – 16 how, that when they come and shared the word of God, the people heard it, received it and welcomed it as the word of God and it began to effectively work in them as a new believers and a newly formed church.

Paul then said that the church at Thessalonica began to imitate the other churches in Judea because they began to experience the persecution that comes with being a God honoring Christ centered church.

And they were experiencing, as we saw last time, this persecution from their own countrymen, like the other churches did from the unbelieving Judeans, Jews. Who were the same ones who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets sent to testify about Him. And as a result of that, they were filling up the measure of their sins and God's full wrath to be poured out on them.

That brings us to the last few verses of Chapter two and we will pick it up in Verse 17.

Verses 17 - 18: But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you, even I, Paul time and again...

Paul starts by contrasting the hatred of the unbelieving Jews for the Thessalonians with **but we** because he did love them very much as we have seen already. And it was always the desire of Paul's heart to **see** the people in those churches where he had an opportunity to minister to them, because he loved them greatly. He told the church at Philippi while he was in prison in **Philippians 1: 7 – 8 I have you in my heart and I greatly long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.** In **Romans 1: 13** he said **brethren, I often planned to come to you but was hindered** and in **Romans 15: 23 .. having a great desire these many years to come to you.**

Unfortunately, many times he had to leave those churches in a hurry because of the persecution that would happen to him and the threats of death if he were caught. And of course, as **Acts 17: 5 – 10** said, that is exactly what happened to Paul at Thessalonica. *Review.* That is why he says **having been taken away from you..**

By the way, the phrase ‘having been taken away’ is one word in the original language *ap-orphan-izō* and means to orphan someone. He says we were orphaned from you like a child is from its parents.

Paul says that it was only **for a short time in presence**. He had to leave there and went to Berea then to Athens and then to Corinth and it had probably been several months but to him it was a short time.

Paul says ‘I may have been taken away in presence but **not in heart**. You are still on my mind and in my thoughts and prayers often. Paul will say later in **1st Thessalonians 3: 9 – 10**: *Read*. And he **endeavored more eagerly to see their face with great desire, therefore we wanted to come to you, even I Paul time and again**.

Paul says because we love you and because we miss you we had even a greater desire to see you, we were more eager to see you and even I wanted to come to you time and time again. Whatever plans they had made to go back to Thessalonica were never carried through and I am sure the Thessalonians would have wondered why. So Paul tells them why at the end of Verse 18 **but Satan hindered us**.

Paul says that Satan hindered him from coming to the church at Thessalonica but he doesn’t say how he did that. The speculation is that Satan hindered him by the threat of more violence if he came back or because of some deal that was made with Jason’s in his house in **Acts 17: 9** with some type of pledge. But we just don’t know.

The interesting thing is, is that Paul was able to discern between the hindering being from Satan as opposed to being from God or the Holy Spirit closing a door of opportunity. Look at **Acts 16: 6 – 10**. In this case, Paul says Satan hindered him, which speaks volumes about that church and Satan’s desire to hinder the further working in that church by the Apostle Paul.

That word **hinder** *eng-kop-to* which means to cut into or impede. It was a word used in a military setting of an army traveling down the road and then digging a trench or breaking up the road they just crossed over so the enemy couldn't get through. Paul was saying that Satan was supernaturally impeding and cutting into our path to get back to you.

Satan has great determination and resources to do all he can to hinder and frustrate and stop the church from carrying on its ministries to further God's kingdom. Satan wants to destroy God's church and unfortunately he has been successful in some individual churches, but what did Jesus say in **Matthew 16: 18** **on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**

But Satan tries whenever he can to destroy the church or its testimony in the community. He was active in the church in Jerusalem **Acts 5: 1 – 10** where it says **Ananias why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself...** Paul told the church at Corinth in **2nd Corinthians 2: 11** that **Satan wanted to take advantage of them and not to be ignorant of his devices.** Paul told the church at Ephesus through Timothy in **1st Timothy 3: 6 – 7** that Elders should not be **novices and have a good testimony among those who are outside lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the Devil.**

You look at the book of Revelation and you see Satan in several of the churches listed in Chapters Two and Three. You see him in the church at Smyrna in **Revelation 2: 9 – 10**, you see him in the church at Pergamum in **2: 13**, you see him in the church at Thyatira in **2: 24** and you see him in the church at Philadelphia in **3: 9**.

That is because Satan wants to do all he can to ruin and destroy God's church and God's people any way he can because he hates God, he hates Jesus, he hates the gospel, he hates people who are saved from his power and influence

So how does Satan work in the lives of people?

2nd Corinthians 4: 4 ... whose minds the god of this age (Satan) has blinded who do not believe lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God should shine on them.

It is like what the parable of the sower says in **Matthew 13: 18** when **anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, then the wicked one (Satan) comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.** He hates the gospel being preached or listened to.

Satan wants to deceive believers as well. In **2nd Corinthians 11: 3, 13 - 15** Paul said **I fear lest somehow as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.** Satan deceived Eve with lies about God and His words and now Satan inspired teachers were wanting to deceive the believers by teaching another Jesus and a different gospel. Because Satan transforms himself into an angel of light and his demons are ministers of righteousness.

Remember in **Ephesians 6: 11** that we are called to **put on the whole armor of God** why **that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.**

Especially those in leadership and influence within the body of Christ. Remember what Jesus said to Peter in **Luke 22: 31** **Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat.** Sounds like what he did with Job as well.

Paul said in **2nd Corinthians 12: 7** **lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me...** and of course those in leadership in **1st Timothy 3: 7** **that can fall into reproach and snare of the devil.**

It is because, as **1st Peter 5: 8** says, **the devil walks around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.** That same devil, Satan himself, hindered Paul from going to see the Thessalonian church.

By the way, even in that hindrance, God is still sovereign and in control, right? What appears to be a victory by Satan in not allowing Paul to go to Thessalonica really turns out for God's best. If he had gone there we wouldn't have 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. Paul would not have been able to minister to others in other places.

Look at it like this; You remember that in **John 13: 27** it said that **Satan entered into Judas** so that he could make plans to betray Jesus, which he did. But God also allowed that for His own purposes, right. Well, Paul then says in;

Verse 19 - 20: for what is our hope, or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

Paul concludes this chapter by asking and answering a question that, again, reveals his heart of love for them and at the same time encourages them with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul sees the fruit of his ministry in the lives of the Thessalonians and that causes great hope and joy and rejoicing. So he asks first of all **what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing?** Paul wrote a lot about hope and joy and crowns and rejoicing, but the bottom line for him was that his hope and joy and rejoicing were in the return of Jesus Christ. That is what he said in **Titus 2: 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.**

Paul talked about joy and crowns together in **Philippians 4: 1** in the context of the return of Jesus Christ to transform our bodies to be like His, and he says **therefore, my beloved and longed for brethren, my JOY and CROWN, so stand fast in the Lord.**

Paul talked a lot about the different kinds of crowns that one will receive that were symbolic of some type of victory and in this case it is victory at the return of Jesus Christ. Paul said in **2nd Timothy 4: 8** **finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.**

So Paul is telling these Thessalonian believers that they are his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing BECAUSE he will see them in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when He returns.

But notice something fantastic here; He is not with them now because he has been hindered by Satan and can't go to them. But he says I have hope and joy and rejoicing because I will see you again; **WHEN in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming.**

By the way, the word **coming** is *Parousia* and it is used in the context here and in the book of Thessalonians to talk about the rapture of the church, as we shall see later.

What Paul is saying is; we can't see you now but we will see you again, when, at the rapture of the church when Jesus comes for His own. Which also implies that we will know each other when we meet the Lord in the air and have new glorified bodies.

Paul said we were eager to see you again and you have always been in our hearts even while we were away from you for a while. We wanted to come to you but Satan hindered us but I want you to know that when Jesus Christ comes for His church, which includes you, we will see you then and that is great cause for hope, joy and rejoicing.

Gospel and closing Prayer

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Introduction and Review:

Verses 17 – 18a:

Philippians 1: 7 – 8, Romans 1: 13, 15: 23
Acts 17: 5 – 10, 1st Thessalonians 3: 9 – 10
Acts 16: 6 – 10, Matthew 16: 18
Acts 5: 1 – 10, 2nd Corinthians 2: 11
1st Timothy 3: 6 – 7, Revelation 2: 9 – 10
Revelation 2: 13, 2: 24, 3: 9
2 Corinthians 4: 4, 11: 3, 13 – 15
Matthew 13: 18, Ephesians 6: 11
Luke 22: 31, 2 Corinthians 12: 7
1st Timothy 3: 7, 1st Peter 3: 8, John 13: 27

Verses 19 – 20:

Titus 2: 13, Philippians 4: 1
2nd Timothy 4: 8

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1st Timothy 3: 6 – 7, Revelation 2: 9 – 10
Revelation 2: 13, 2: 24, 3: 9
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Matthew 13: 18, Ephesians 6: 11
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