

“Destined for Affliction”
1 Thessalonians 3:3-4
(Preached at Trinity, July 28, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. John Foxe wrote: “It is both wonderful and horrible to peruse the descriptions of the sufferings of those godly martyrs as they are described by ancient historians. Their torments were as various as the ingenuity of man, excited by the devil, could devise, and their numbers were truly incredible. “Some,” says Robanus, “were slain with the sword, some burnt with fire, some scourged with whips, some stabbed with forks of iron, some fastened to the cross or gibbet, some drowned in the sea, some frozen with cold, some starved with hunger, were left naked to the open shame of the world.”¹
2. For some, such stories seem strange and distant. Others cover their ears in disgust and disbelief. On the dust jacket of Foxe's “Christian Martyrs of the World” we read, “Tribulation and persecution for us? No, surely not; they are for other lands and for other times. But the history of our Christian faith does not give us much hope for a long period of Christian peace of mind based on compatible, popular living.”
3. The truth is, persecution and martyrdom continues worldwide. Gordon-Conwell's Theological Seminary Center for the Study of Global Christianity recently released its annual report on the persecution of Christians, which found that as many as 90,000 Christians died for their faith in the last year. This staggering figure has been the constant rate for the ten years 2005-2015. Even if these figures are exaggerated the number is still sobering.
4. Franklin Graham speaking at recent Washington DC gathering, “I am sure the number of Christians who are in prison or martyred each year would stagger our mind if we really knew what the total number really was,” Graham told the opening session of the inaugural World Summit in Defense of Christians. “And it would send us to our knees in sorrow and in prayer.”
5. The truth is, this has been the history of the Christian church. It puts the words of Paul in **Verses 3-4** in context. Paul knew the Thessalonians were under great pressure from their neighbors who hated the Gospel. Just as Paul had suffered from their vicious hatred, the newly saved Thessalonian Christians were also suffering. It was the common experience of every believer.
1 Thessalonians 2:14 NAU - "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews"
6. Paul knew it was happening, but how were they holding up? Were they enduring well? When Paul could no longer bear not knowing he determined to send Timothy to them.

¹ John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000).

- I. Paul describes the suffering as common to all
- A. He uses the first-person plural verb “we are destined”
1. There is difficulty in identifying the subjects of the plural. Paul moves back and forth between the singular and plural throughout the epistle. For example,

1 Thessalonians 2:18 NAU - "For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan hindered us."

 - a. In **Verse 1** Paul uses the plural, “when we could endure it no longer.” To whom is he referring?
 - b. The authors are described as “Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy,” but it isn’t likely **Verses 1-2** include Timothy. It would be strange to say “we sent Timothy” if it included Timothy sending himself.
 - c. The plural in **Verses 1-2** is more likely what is called an epistolary plural. Paul is using the plural “we” to refer to himself. This becomes clearer in **Verse 5**

1 Thessalonians 3:5 NAU - "For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain."
 2. In **Verse 3**, however, Paul is referring to himself and those with him when they arrived at Thessalonica and suffered persecution, and also including the new Christians who have suffered since his departure. He might have said, “We all have been destined for this.”
 3. John Eadie writes: “The plural verb does not refer to Paul alone, but immediately to Paul and the Thessalonians, represent at the same time all believers. Those afflictions are not accidental on the one hand, and we do not court them or merit them on the other hand, but our position brings them on us, and God by his grace has set us in that position.”²
- B. Paul’s point is that their suffering is the common experience of all believers
1. G.K. Beale writes: “The time of tribulation will continue until the final advent of the Messiah, so that the lives of Christians during the interim will be characterized by trial. This has come about by God’s sovereign hand and has been planned from long ago. Such suffering tests the metal of the true believer. The only pathway leading to the eternal kingdom is one lined with trials through which believers must steadfastly pass in order finally to enter in. “Paul is not thinking of a period of persecution which will pass and the church return to normality; normality is persecution”³

² John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians*, ed. W. Young, (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 106.

³ G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 99.

2. It was the experience of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey.
 - a. When they arrived at Antioch in Pisidia many believed but some were so violent they were forced to flee.
Acts 13:50 NAU - "But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."
 - b. In Iconium Paul was stoned
Acts 14:19 NAU - "But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead."
 3. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and cast into prison
 4. Arriving at Thessalonica their preaching caused a riot and they were soon forced to depart.
Acts 17:5 NAU - "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar"
- C. We are reminded over and over in the New Testament that Christians will often endure persecution. We've seen this over and over.
1. Peter tells us it should not be considered something strange
1 Peter 4:12-14 NAU - "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."
 2. This was Paul's constant teaching
Acts 14:21-22 NAU - "they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
 3. We have also been taught of our Lord
John 16:33 NAU - "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."
Matthew 10:22-24 NAU - "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. ²³ "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish *going through* the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master."
Matthew 5:10-12 NAU - "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

- II. Paul places it in an eternal perspective – we have been ordained to suffer for Christ "for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this."
- A. The word literally refers to setting something in its place
1. For example:
John 2:6 NAU - "Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each."
 2. The word can refer to something fixed or put in place by way of Divine appointment.
Luke 2:34 NAS - "And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed--"
 3. God has decreed or appointed or destined that His people would suffer. We saw this in a similar fashion in Philippians
Philippians 1:29 NAU - "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,"
 4. Paul affirms this in **Romans 8**. Those who share with Christ in His inheritance also share with Him in His suffering.
Romans 8:16-17 NAU - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*."
 - a. Paul is making a statement of condition – suffering is a part of being united with Christ – of sharing in the life of Christ. It is evidence that we have been adopted. It is evidence of our election. God has appointed our salvation and our suffering as the result.
 - b. It is stated like this: "If we are children then we are heirs--heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ—if we suffer with Him." ESV – “provided we suffer with Him.”
 5. God in His infinite love and wisdom has determined that His beloved people would suffer upon the earth.
- B. Why has God destined us for affliction?
1. It distinguishes us from the world that hates God. This hostile, God-hating, Christ-rejecting world doesn't like believers because we live in contrast to their sinfulness. Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised when we endure persecution. Jesus said,
John 15:18-19 NAU - "f the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."
Philippians 1:28 NAU - "in no way alarmed by *your* opponents-- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God."
2 Timothy 3:12 NAU - "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

2. Suffering is a mark of God's grace upon us
Philippians 1:29 NAU - "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,"
 - a. The word for "granted" is χαρίζομαι from the word χάρις which is the word for grace. It means to give freely or show favor. It refers to God's graciousness.
 - b. God graciously grants that we will suffer. Suffering is a gift of grace. It is an honor to share in the sufferings of Christ. It is a token of His choosing us and of being a part of a long line of faithful saints.
1 Peter 4:12-14 NAU - "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."
 - c. Jesus said suffering for His sake is cause for rejoicing
Matthew 5:10-12 NAU - "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
3. Suffering displays God's love upon His people as He sustains them and abides with them in the midst of their suffering.
Psalms 34:19 NAU - "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all."
John 16:33 NAU - "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."
4. God sends persecution to humble us and cause us to depend more and more upon Him
 - a. Suffering strengthens us and causes us to mature in our Christian life
1 Peter 5:10-11 NAU - "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. ¹¹ To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen."
 - b. We discover our strength in Christ when we discover our weakness in suffering.
2 Corinthians 12:10 NAU - "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

5. Suffering reminds us that this world is not our home and causes us to long for eternity.
 - a. Too often Christians live as if this life is our reward and to seek all of the pleasures of this life should be our goal.
 - b. Rather, we should seek the glories of the life to come.
Matthew 5:12 NAU - " Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great . . ."

Conclusion:

1. We must never forget that persecution is by God's appointment. He has granted to us both to believe and to suffer for His great name sake. We have been destined for this.
2. As we shine forth the glories of Christ we will face opposition. But we do not fear the rejection of men because we have been accepted by God. His opinion is the only one that counts.
3. May God help us to live boldly and fearlessly as we stand courageously against the assaults of Satan.