

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Out of Sight, Not Out of Mind 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 Part 2

Many of you here this morning, I am sure heard about these three men who attempted to perform an exorcism on a Korean woman, two weeks ago. In the process of performing the exorcism, which involved physical battering, she died.

This was a tragic incident where perhaps well meaning but misguided individuals made a horrible mistake. Can people be demon possessed? If we use the scriptures as our sole basis of faith and practice we would have to say, “Certainly, people can be possessed by demons.” Are people currently being possessed. I don’t know? I have not seen any demon possessed people personally. I have seen people who have been emotionally disturbed, I have seen people who have been mentally ill. But even those I would say did not fit the pattern of a demon possessed person as described in the New Testament.

A demon possessed person is not someone who is simply not thinking right. A demon possessed person is not thinking at all. A totally different entity has taken control of their body and it is possible for you to carry on a conversation with the demon if you are so inclined. And it doesn’t appear that demons are bashful about identifying themselves for exactly who they are. If you are talking to someone who thinks that they are Julius Caesar you are most likely not talking to a demon, you are most likely talking to a mentally ill person. And the two are not synonymous at all. Mental illness and demon possession are two totally separate problems.

I know that demon possession gets a lot of press in evangelical literature, but I am fairly well convinced that these stories of demon possession are very much oversold. At the time of Christ demon possession was quite common, but for whatever reason the occurrences of demon possession have diminished.

Someone might be saying well if you are playing down the frequency of demonic possession are you also saying that Satanic activity is also diminishing? I would hope that no one would in any way conclude that from the remarks I have just made. Certainly the Scriptures give us every indication that Satanic activity will continue throughout the church age. Certainly Satan is very active. The scriptures are very clear concerning the fact that **“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”**

The continuing struggle against the world forces of darkness should not be a surprise to us at all. But it may come as a surprise to you how he sometimes expresses his hostility toward Christ and his church.

We have begun to examine **1 Thess. 2:17-20**. In this passage of scripture Paul is apparently responding to accusations from his Jewish opponents in Thessalonica that he doesn’t care about the Thessalonian church.

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They were apparently telling the Thessalonian church this because Paul had not recently visited them. Paul is concerned that these accusations might effect his ministry to the Thessalonians and he felt he had to respond.

In his response in **VV. 17-20** he wants these Thessalonians to know that he has a very deep affection for them both in respect to time and eternity.

He begins by speaking about his present affection for the Thessalonians in **V. 17**. Let us read, **“But we brethren”** (in contrast to Jewish opponents) **“having been bereft of you”** (having been torn away as a parent being orphaned from a child. **“For a short time”** (at the time of this writing it was approximately two to three months but would eventually turn into five years). **“in person not in spirit,”** (yes we are apart from you geographically but you are in our heart). Then he says, **“were all the more** (Lit. “more abundantly”) **eager** (introduces the thought of speed and diligence) **with great desire** (“passion”) **to see your face.”** Paul was in no way indifferent about seeing the Thessalonians. He wanted to meet with them not so much from a social standpoint as he was eager to be with them from a ministry standpoint that he might contribute to their progress and joy in the faith.

So we left off last week with us seeing Paul personally pressing to be with them. And though this was true he was unable to visit them. WHY? Paul now answers that question. And guess who was the problem? It was Satan. Satan was disrupting his travel plans.

Let us again read **V. 17** but this time let us add **V. 18**. **“But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while- in person, not in spirit -were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. (18) For we wanted to come to you -- I Paul, more than once -and yet Satan thwarted us.**

Isn't this interesting. The reason why Paul could not get where he wanted to go when he wanted to go was Satan. Does this mean that whenever Paul could not go to the place that he wanted to go, when he wanted to go that it was Satan that was preventing him? I don't think so.

In **Acts 16:6-7** Paul was on his second missionary journey and he was trying to go into Asia, but it tells us that he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And then it says that he was trying to go into Mysia but the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them to do this either.

There is a spiritual battle going on in this world between the forces of the Lord and the forces of Satan. And whether or not you or I are comfortable with this thought or not it is true. And whether we like it or not people, such as ourselves are often times caught up in that battle.

Paul makes it very clear in **V. 18** that he sees himself caught up in this battle. He sees his inability to get to Thessalonica as clearly the work of Satan. How could Paul tell the difference? How did he know it was Satan thwarting him rather than the Lord Himself as the Lord had in Asia and Bithynia? I would assume that it was because what was prevented him from coming was rooted in evil.

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There was a time many many years ago in our church when a root of bitterness had taken hold in our fellowship. There were those were unable to set aside their anger and their personal grievances and the venom of their bitterness was spilling over into our fellowship. It disrupted the ministries of our church. It threatened the vitality of our witness. If someone came up to me at that point, even someone who I may have cared for very much and had asked me go to such and such a place in order to do such and such a ministry I would have had to decline. And what would I have said to them. I could have said what Paul says here in **VV. 17, 18** **“But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while - in person, not in spirit - were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. (18) For we wanted to come to you more than once and yet Satan thwarted us.”**

We as God’s children have a clear mission. We are to go and make disciples, baptizing them, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Let us not fool ourselves and think that we will in our efforts to be obedient to Christ have an unchallenged path.

Martin Luther wrote a familiar hymn with some very meaningful words entitled *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. It goes like this, “A mighty fortress is our God. A bulwark never failing. Our helper He amid the flood, Of mortal ills prevailing. For still our ancient foe. Doth seek to work us woe- His craft and power are great. And armed with cruel hate, On earth is not His equal.” 2ND. VERSE “Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing. Were not the right man on our side. The man of God’s own choosing. dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He - Lord Sabbaoth His name. From age to age the same. And He must win the battle.”

Paul loved the Thessalonians. He cared about the Thessalonians but he was finding it very difficult to get to them. Because Satan was “thwarting” him. The NIV says that Satan was “hindering” him. The word (ENKOPTO) literally means to “cut into” and was used of impeding persons by breaking up the road. Satan through some kind of evil activity was in a figurative sense breaking up the road between Corinth and Thessalonica so that Paul and his companions could not get there.

Satan’s activity was not simply isolated to Paul and his companions. Satan’s activity is very much focused on all those who know and love the Lord. Satan’s attack is now very much focused upon the Church of Christ. In the very early days of the church we see Satan very present and attacking. In **Acts 5:3** Peter says to Ananias, **“Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?”** As Paul began his first missionary journey we see him confronting Elymas the magician on the Island Cyprus and he says to him in **Acts 13:10** **“You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? And it just continued on and on and on.**

It may be that Satan at times changes his tactics such as in the area of demon possession. But this does not mean that Satan is any less active.

We see the breadth of Satan’s attack against the church very clearly in the book of Revelation. In order to appreciate what I am going to say I would like to provide for you a very brief outline of the book of Revelation.

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It is not new at all. In fact the Apostle John himself has outlined the book for us in **Rev. 1:19**. **“write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.”** Chapter 1 of Revelation gives us information concerning the things which John had seen. The “things which are” appears to be the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2&3. These were very real literal churches at the time of the writing of this epistle. These two chapters therefore contain divine revelation and exhortation pertaining to the present. Then beginning in chapter 4 we have the future events which will transpire after the church has been removed from this world at the rapture.

I believe that Christ’s instructions to the seven churches in **Rev. 2-3** give us great insight into the breadth of Satan’s attacks against the church.

The church of Smyrna - Let us read **Rev. 2:8-11** **“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: (9) I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.** (A reference to a persecution being led by Jews who were Jews physically but who are not doing the deeds of Abraham but rather their father the devil).

The Church of Pergamum - Let us read **Rev. 2:12,13** **“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: (13) I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”** The mention of Satan’s seat or throne is most likely a reference to satanic power in the evil religious character of the city of Pergamos manifested in persecution of Christians and perhaps epitomized in the worship of Esculapius, the serpent God.

The Church of Thyatira - Let us read **Rev. 2:24** **“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them, - I place no other burden on you.”** **VV. 18-23** had made it clear that a person that John called Jezebel had introduced false doctrine into the fellowship of Thyatira. He identifies the source of this false teaching as from the pit itself. He calls the things that were being introduced into the church as the **“the deep things of Satan.”**

The Church of Philadelphia - Let us read **Rev. 3:9** **“Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”** Again we see hostile Jews being identified with Satan.

Satanic activity throughout this present age will be directed at the Church of Jesus Christ. Not only at the church corporately but certainly individually.

Certainly we saw this in respect to Peter. In **Luke 22:31** Jesus made it very clear to Peter that Satan wanted him but Christ would not let that happen.

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And certainly we know that Satan was continually after Paul. In **2 Cor. 12** Paul was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh which was described as a “**messenger from Satan.**”

When we come to faith in Christ we need to know that things will not be easy. In fact the pattern that we see in the N.T. would indicate the more zealous that you are in pursuing righteousness and seeking to be obedient to the Lord the greater the opposition.

Someone might say then, “If this is the way it is let us therefore run for cover!” How can we even consider this? Has not the Lord purchased us with his precious blood and promised us that he is preparing a place for us in the glory of heaven. Don’t we understand that we can even the midst of the most intense satanic assault against that we can be assured of blessing. **A LIFE COMMITTED TO FOLLOWING THE LORD IN THE MIDST OF SATANIC ATTACK WILL NEVER LEAD TO REGRET. THIS IS THE LORD’S PROMISE TO US.**

WE NEED TO KNOW THAT SATAN INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY WILL MAKE OUR CERTAIN PATH TO GLORY A ROCKY PATH.

CONCLUSION

Let us not be naive about this. But not only will he make our path to glory rocky but also the path of every single believer as they are in the pursuit of his will. I would hope that this understanding would not only help us to be persevering but also to be more understanding of our brothers and sisters in Christ who like Paul may not be able to everything in exactly the way we might have wanted them to. Not because they would not have desired it that way but simply because they are being “thwarted.”

Paul loved the Thessalonians. He was concerned for the Thessalonians. He wanted to be with them. But he was being thwarted by Satan. He had been trying to get there for several months but he was unable. And those three months turned into five years. Not because he did not care. Not because he was not concerned but rather Satan was very actively opposing a very mature and effective man of God.