

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Out of Sight, Not Out of Mind 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 Part 3

Many of you who are here this morning are experiencing trouble. And that trouble can take on many forms. It may be that you are experiencing health problems, work problems, business problems, school problems, family problems, financial problems, legal problems, house problems, car problems etc. etc. And it may be that some of the problems that you are experiencing are the direct result of your seeking to live righteously in Christ Jesus.

And this is exactly what Paul experienced. We see this clearly in **1 Thess. 2:17-20**. Paul was trying to get to Thessalonica. Paul was trying to get to Thessalonica in order to minister to the Thessalonian church but he was unable to get there because Satan was thwarting him. Satan was making his life difficult. Satan was causing him trouble.

People have this very mistaken belief that when we come to Christ and receive Him as our Lord and Savior that the troubles in our life somehow diminish. This is simply an unrealistic expectation. In fact we should expect that once we commit ourselves to Christ and actively become involved in working out His will for our lives that our troubles could very easily increase not decrease. And this additional trouble may in fact be generated by Satanic forces.

Let us read **VV. 17-18** **“But we brethren** (in contrast to our Jewish opponents) **having been bereft of you** (having been torn away away as a parent being orphaned form 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 - were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.** Paul very desperately wanted to go to the Thessalonians but he was being prevented. **Verse 18** makes this very clear. **“For we wanted to come to you I Paul , more than once and yet Satan Thwarted us.**

Paul saw his attempts to minister to the Thessalonians as being thwarted by Satan. Satan was in a figurative sense breaking up the road between Corinth and Thessalonica. Satan was clearly causing trouble for Paul and his companions.

We do not come to Christ in order to be set free from problems in respect to this life. We come to Christ in order to receive the gift of eternal life by entering into a personal relationship with God. The blessedness of this new relationship is the fact that we will never be left alone. What were the very last words of Christ to his disciples as recorded for us in **Matt. 28:20** **“And lo, I am with you always.”** When we come to Jesus for salvation to be delivered from sin we do not simply have the certain knowledge that we are delivered from God’s future outpouring of wrath but we have the certain knowledge that we have entered into a personal relationship with the God of this universe and we will never be alone.

When we become a Christian we should not expect the troubles in our lives to diminish. In fact as we commit ourselves to live out a life of obedience in the cause of Christ our troubles could very easily increase.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

But always remember we are not alone. When I am weak He is there to be strong, when I am weary He is there to give strength, when I am sorrowful He is there to give comfort, when I am confused He is there to give direction.

Paul was trying to get to Thessalonica but he was being thwarted by Satan. And Paul's enemies were trying to tell the Thessalonian church that he was not coming because he did not care. Paul is writing this passage to communicate in the clearest possible way that this just was not true.

In **VV. 17,18** Paul made it very clear that he presently cared for them deeply and had on more than one occasion sought to go to them but Satan had thwarted him. Satan was not making his life easy. In fact Satan was making his life very difficult. But even so the Thessalonians still held a very special place in his heart.

But the Thessalonians might say “Yes this is true now but what about the future. Perhaps Paul’s affection for the Thessalonians might diminish with time. Perhaps as more time passes they will not be as important to Paul as they now are. Paul wants to make sure that they understand that he had loved them, that he presently loves them, and he will always love them.”

I am hopeful that as we continue to consider this passage of Scripture that the affection that Paul feels for these Thessalonians in time and eternity might help us to see the depth of affection that the Lord desires that His Church would feel for one another. It is my hope that this passage of Scripture might stimulate us in such a way that our love might still more abound for one another.

THE SPECIAL PLACE THE THESSALONIANS HELD IN PAUL’S HEART IN RESPECT TO ETERNITY

Lets read **VV. 19,20** **“For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? (20) For you are our glory and joy.”** Paul in these verses points to a future time and declares to the Thessalonians that even in this future time his love for them will continue unabated.

What is this future time that Paul points to in these verses? It is the “coming of Jesus.” The word for “coming” in this verse is PAROUSIA. It literally means “to be alongside.” It is used in the NT of a person’s presence as contrasted to his absence. It contains the thought of the “coming” or “arrival” of a person as the first stage of his presence that is to follow.

Paul is pointing his readers to look with him at a future time period when Jesus was going to come alongside of them. The question therefore becomes this, “When will Jesus come alongside of his church?” Jesus will come alongside of the church at the rapture. This event is described in **1 Thess. 4:13-18** **“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming (PAROUSIA) of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.** Now Paul goes on to describe this PAROUSIA.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

(16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” When will Jesus come alongside His church it will be at the rapture? It will be at the event that is described in these verses.

It is helpful for us to make a distinction between the rapture, which is the event that was just described and the second advent. These are two distinct events. In the rapture the church is caught up to meet Christ in the air while at the second advent Christ returns to the earth. In the rapture, Christ comes to claim his bride, but in the second advent He returns with his bride. The rapture results in the removal of the church and the inception of the tribulation and the second advent results in the establishment of the millennial kingdom. The rapture is imminent, while the second advent is preceded by a multitude of signs. The rapture brings a message of comfort while the second advent is accompanied by a message of judgment. The rapture is related to God’s program for the church, while the second advent is related to God’s program for Israel and the world.

When the Scripture uses the word PAROUSIA, which literally means “to be alongside” we need to understand that this word can refer either to the rapture and God’s program for the church or to the second advent God’s program for Israel and the world. In the passage that is before us the PAROUSIA is referring to that future time when the church will be caught up to be with Christ.

When Paul was writing this passage Paul was still alive. Paul and the church were waiting for Christ’s PAROUSIA. At any moment Paul believed and the Thessalonians believed that Christ could appear in the clouds and catch them up to be with Christ. We, as the church, still have this hope. At any moment Jesus could appear in the clouds and catch us up in the air so that we might always be with Him. Let us think on this for a moment.

It will be the very first time that we will meet the Lord Jesus face to face? And we see Him **I John 3:2** tells us that we shall be like Him. We will for the first time in our life be surrounded by, enveloped by, and enjoying perfect righteousness amidst the heavenly host. What a day of rejoicing that will be. But it will not only be for us alone but for all of the church. For all of the church down through the centuries. What will be on our minds? What will fill your heart?

That might be a very difficult question for us to answer. But we do get an insight into the mind and the heart of the Apostle Paul. We get a glimpse of what he might be thinking and feeling.

Let us read **V. 19,20** “**For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?**” He is proud of the Thessalonians as a parent would be of his children.

Paul says that the Thessalonians are his “**hope.**” His hope is that “**he who began a good work in them will carry it on to completion**” (Phil. 1:6).

Paul says that the Thessalonians are his “**joy.**” This joy is being produced as he is watching them mature and grow in their faith.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

This joy is not at all minimal the Apostle John in **3 John 4** **“I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”**

But not only were the Thessalonians his “hope” and his “joy.” But they would one day be his crown at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we meet Paul at the PAROUSIA, at the rapture of Jesus Christ. Paul is going to looking around and looking for the Thessalonians. And their presence at Christ’s coming Paul refers to as being his “crown.” The word he uses for “crown” is the word “STEPHANOS” which was the victor’s crown.

His metaphor is of the wreath awarded to the winner of an event in the games. Every game had a wreath distinctive to it. The olive wreath of the Olympian games, the laurel of the Pythian games, the parsley of the Nemean games, etc. In Paul’s context the Thessalonians were his crown. And their presence at the coming of Christ would be an eternal testimony to the fact that Paul had not run in vain. They would be a lasting testimony to the fact that his life and ministry were effective. They will be a lasting testimony to the fact that his life had counted.

It is a horrible thing to pour our lives into something and then see it come to nothing. Consider someone who has poured their lives into their lawn. That lawn will not be in heaven. Consider someone who has poured their lives into making money. That money will not be in heaven. Consider someone who has poured their lives into building a company. That company will not be in heaven. Consider someone who has poured their lives into building a strong marriage. Though this is a wonderful work that marriage will not be intact in heaven. Consider someone who has poured their lives into their family. Though this is a good work their family has they know it will not be in heaven.

What will be in heaven? Only the redeemed. We need to be pouring our lives into people. We need to be investing our lives into that which is eternal. Not just helping people to be good but more importantly helping them to come to know the Lord Jesus has the Lord and Savior and teaching them to serve Him.

Paul's enemies were saying that Paul was a charlatan. He was doing what he did not for you but for him. His ministry amongst you was a sham. And besides he does not care for you at all. Paul responds by defending himself. He communicates with them in **VV. 17,18** that he presently cares for them deeply. And in **VV. 19,20** he communicates to them that he will always care for them. They are not just some sidelight. They are the heart and soul of his life in time and eternity.

This does not mean that we should not seek to be gainfully employed, this does not mean that we can’t own property, this does not mean that we should not seek to be a good husband or wife, or a good mother or father. But what it does mean that everything that we have and everything that we are should be seen as a means to an end.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

This was clearly communicated by the parable of the unrighteous steward in **Luke 16:1-13**. Now He was also saying to the disciples, “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this steward was reported to him as squandering his possessions.” (2) And he called him and said to him, “What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.” (3) And the steward said to himself “What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. (4) I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the stewardship, they will receive me into their homes.” (5) And he summoned each one of his master’s debtors, and he began saying to the first, “how much do you owe my master?” (6) And he said, “A hundred measures of oil.” And he said to him, “Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.” (7) Then he said to another, “And how much do you owe?” And he said, “A hundred measures of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill, and write eighty.” (8) And his master praised the unrighteous steward because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. (9) “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. (10) He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.” Money is not an end in itself. It needs to be viewed by us as a means to an end. Money needs to be viewed by us as a resource that can be used to serve the eternal interest of people. But not only money everything that we have needs to be used to serve this eternal purpose.

Hopefully my marriage will be used of the Lord to reach people for Christ and to teach them to serve Him. Hopefully my family will be used of the Lord to reach people for Christ and to teach them to serve Him. Hopefully my material resources will be used to reach people for Christ and to teach them to serve Him. Hopefully my financial resources will be used to reach people for Christ and to teach them to serve Him. The world see the things of this world as an end in itself. But we need to be wiser than that. We must see the things of this world as a means to an end. And that is to reach people with the gospel and teach them to serve Him.

CONCLUSION

Paul was investing his life, everything that he had to serve the eternal interest of people. There was nothing more important for him to do as a servant of Christ than to minister to people with eternity in view. And that is what he had done in respect to the Thessalonians.

They were his hope, they were his joy, and they would be his crown. How could he not love them both in respect to time and eternity. What does the scripture tell us. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also. We cannot invest all that we have and are in the lives of people and not care for them.

How are you investing your life? Are you investing your life in people? Are you seeking to help people along the path to glory? Are there people in your life now that you could say with Paul that they are your hope, your joy, and who will be your crown?

MAIN THOUGHT: INVESTING OUR LIVES IN MAKING AND TRAINING DISCIPLES IS GREATLY REWARDED IN TIME AND ETERNITY