

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Take a Stand 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 Part 1**

How would your neighbor or your workmate complete this sentence? We really live if! They might answer, “We really live if we are able to have a happy home.” They might answer, “We really live if we are able to achieve financial independence.” They might answer, “We really live if we can find a job that we really enjoy!” All those answers certainly are good answers. And certainly it is a wonderful thing to have a happy home. Certainly it would be a wonderful thing to achieve financial independence, and certainly it would be terrific if we could find a job that we truly enjoyed. But I believe all these answers fall short of the best answer. They fall short of the best answer because they are all rooted in things that are passing away.

Then you might say, then what would be a better answer? And I would say let us look at Paul’s answer in **1 Thessalonians 3:8** **“For now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.”** Paul did not invest his life in building a happy home, Paul did not invest his life in financial independence, Paul did not invest his life in finding a fulfilling career. PAUL INVESTED HIS LIFE IN THE ETERNAL RATHER THAN THE TEMPORAL. PAUL INVESTED HIS LIFE IN THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF PEOPLE. And certainly we will again see that here in the passage we will begin to examine this morning

Before a child can walk, he must learn to stand. Parents typically are very involved in this learning process. In the beginning of the process, we as parents might be fairly passive simply watching our child struggle to pull themselves up next to some piece of furniture. Then we will begin to extend a finger for the child to grab, while the child is grasping onto our finger we will gently pry their fingers away leaving them teetering in front of us until they come crashing down into a sitting position onto the floor. I am not sure if this is good parenting, but it certainly is not uncommon parenting.

Parents want to see their children grow up. Parents want to see their children pass through the various stages of development that will ultimately lead to maturity. But for whatever reasons sometimes parents are deprived of this opportunity.

Paul was a “spiritual parent” to the Thessalonian believers. But he had been forced to leave them before he had the joy of seeing them standing on their own. They may have begun to pull themselves up beside various pieces of furniture, spiritually speaking, while Paul was with them. And they certainly were headed in a right direction, but Paul had been uncertain as to whether they had matured to the point where they could stand firmly in the midst of ongoing and persistent trials. And he alludes to that uncertainty here in this chapter.

Let us read **VV. 1-13** **“Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone; (2) And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, (3) so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.**

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**(4) For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. (5) 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 should be in vain. (6) But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, (7) For this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith. (8) for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. (9) For what thanks can render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, (10) as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face and may complete what is lacking in your faith. (11) Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; (12) and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; (13) so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”** In the first two chapters, Paul explained how the church was born and nurtured. But now in chapter three Paul will be dealing with the next step in maturity “standing in the midst of tribulation.” Paul was not only concerned that the Thessalonians would experience spiritual birth, and that they would be nurtured, but that they would learn to stand. And he had that concern even though he was not with them.

Paul wanted to be a part of the Thessalonians continuing, maturing even though he may be absent from them. But how could Paul participate in their continuing development while he was away from them? In the passage we have just read Paul outlines for us two ministries that he performed to help these new Christians become firmly established.

I am hoping, that as we examine these various efforts that Paul made to participate in the building up of the saints at Thessalonica that we will again be reminded of the fact that the very best investment that we can make with our lives is in the spiritual welfare of people, and the greatest joy that we can ever experience in life is being privileged to see a visible return on that investment.

### HOW DID PAUL MINISTER TO THE THESSALONIANS?

#### HE SENT THEM A HELPER ( 1 THESS. 3:1-5)

There are at times during the course of our lives, when we truly want to minister to a specific situation, but for whatever reasons it is just impossible. Certainly I can appreciate this dilemma. And certainly, I would have to believe that you can also. Sometimes there is just not enough of us to go around. And in those times it is a wonderful thing to be able to see others whom you have spent time with, pick up the slack. And this is exactly what we see here in this passage. Paul wanted to go to the Thessalonians in order to perform ministry he was simply unable to do that. It had nothing to do with his willingness, it had everything to do with his availability. When these times come it is very encouraging to be able to turn to a Christian brother for help. This is why it is so important for us to follow the instruction of Paul to Timothy in **2 Tim. 2:1-2 “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2) And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”**

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If we would be faithful to do this then hopefully we will find that we will have helpers to assist us in the time of our need. Certainly Paul had a very pleasant experience in the passage we are looking at this morning.

Paul had repeatedly sought to return back to Thessalonica but Satan had figuratively been breaking up the road. Satan was preventing Paul from returning. And Paul's repeated efforts to revisit Thessalonica were made more frustrating by the lack of news about the church there, so the suspense grew until it says in **V. 1-2** **"Therefore when we could endure it no longer we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone; (2) and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ."** Paul is telling the Thessalonians about the process that brought Timothy to them.

Paul being unable to go to the Thessalonians sent Timothy. On the one hand it was a wonderful thing to be able to turn to Timothy and ask him to go but on the other hand it is not an easy thing to do. There is a price that is paid when you send away those that you have spent time with. There is a price to pay when you send away those who have co-labored with you. We experienced that pain when we sent Randy and Rebecca to Japan. It was a wonderful thing that we had the privilege of contributing to their lives while we were here. It was a wonderful thing to be able to turn to them when we had a need in Japan. But we experienced a real loss. Paul experienced that kind of loss here.

There was no one closer to Paul than Timothy. Paul trusted Timothy, Paul relied on Timothy. In **Phil. 2:19-20** Paul writes to the Philippians **"But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. (20) for I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare."** We see Paul's feelings for Timothy clearly in this passage when he refers to Timothy as **"our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ."** Paul was not satisfied in simply saying "our fellow worker", no he calls Timothy **"God's fellow worker."** There was no one that Paul valued more than Timothy and yet he sent him away.

Paul had three reasons for sending Timothy on this mission to Thessalonica beyond expressing his own longing to be with them.

The first was "to strengthen and encourage them in their faith." The word "strengthen" is the Greek word STERIZO which means "to fix" or to "make fast." And the word "encourage" is the Greek word PARAKALEO which means to "call to one's side." Timothy was sent by Paul to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith. Timothy was to come alongside of the Thessalonians and fix them, root them, and ground them firmly. The more we know about God and Christ and the more deeply this knowledge is imbedded in us the more resolute we will be.

How is this accomplished? It is through instruction. In **Acts 15:32** Luke says, **"And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message."** The bible teaches us that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Timothy was to go and minister the truth of God's word to the Thessalonians.

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The second reason for sending Timothy is given to us in V. 3 “So that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.” Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians sufferings might lead them astray from Christ. Can this actually happen? Of course! If people are coming to Christ in order to make their lives easier in respect to the circumstances of this life, they will be quickly exposed when trials come into their lives. This was the point Christ was making in the parable of the four soils in **Matt. 13**. In that parable when the sun of persecution rises it wilts the plant which sprouted from the seed which had fallen on shallow ground.

The shallow ground is the person who is looking for an earthly salvation. A salvation from difficult circumstances. And that is simply not what the gospel is offering. The best way to avoid people from being misled and then eventually falling away under the onslaught of persecution is to forewarn them. And that is exactly what Paul had done. Look again at the verse “**for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.**” Like Jesus before him, Paul spells out the truth that trials are part of the package of being a Christian.

There is no health, wealth, or prosperity doctrine being preached here. Why? Because the Bible does not teach it. Peter said in **1 Peter 5:10** “**And 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.**” James said in **James 1:2-3** “**Consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) and let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.** Can you imagine the grief, the health, wealth, and prosperity doctrine can cause. For those who embrace this doctrine the only conclusion that they can come to when suffering enters their lives or the lives of others is that they are in some way responsible for affliction.

Paul was sending Timothy to the Thessalonians to make sure that they understood this. That they understood that affliction is a part of the Christian package. Why was he so certain that they had some understanding of this doctrine? Look at **V. 4** “**For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.**” Again I want to remind you this morning that when we come to Christ not only can we expect that the tribulations common to man will continue but we will in addition to this experience Satanic opposition.

This leads us to the third reason why Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians. To find out how they were doing in light of Satanic opposition. Let us read **V. 5** “**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 should be in vain.**” Paul was concerned that certain of the Thessalonians had fallen away from their outward identification with the church. That is what he means. Paul was not fearful that certain Thessalonians had lost their salvation. Paul was fearful that their labor amongst the Thessalonians had been done in vain. What is the difference? The difference is simple. Paul knew that if a person was in Christ, truly born again, that nothing could separate them from the love of Christ. In **Romans 8:35-39** he makes this very clear. “**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**”

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**Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) Just as it is written, “For thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” (37) But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** He was not fearful that we would be separated from Christ. HE WAS FEARFUL THAT THOSE THAT HE THOUGHT WERE CHRISTIANS AFTER ALL THEIR HARD WORK MIGHT IN FACT NOT BE AT ALL. AND THAT WOULD NOW BE EVIDENT IF THEY HAD FALLEN AWAY UNDER TRIAL.

PAUL IN ESSENCE BY THIS STATEMENT IS TELLING US HE REALLY DID NOT KNOW WHEN A PERSON MADE A PROFESSION OF FAITH, WHETHER THEY WERE A GENUINELY BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN OR NOT.

### CONCLUSION

Paul could not endure being away from the Thessalonians any longer. He needed to, in some tangible way, as their spiritual father extend ministry back to the Thessalonians so that they might continue to grow and mature. That he might be assured that they would be able to stand even in the midst of extreme persecution.

He extended ministry to the Thessalonians in two different ways. The first of those ways was by sending a helper, his faithful ministry companion Timothy.

He did this in order to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith, to remind them that suffering for Christ was unavoidable, and to come back with news of how they were doing.

Though it would be encouraging for Paul to have someone like Timothy to be able to send. It would also have to be painful to send someone who was so important to him personally.

But why would he do this? Why would he be willing to send Timothy? Because Paul really lived if the Thessalonians stood firm in their faith.

What is driving your decisions? Are you doing what you are doing because you are investing in people in light of eternity? Or are you investing in yourself and the things of this world which are passing away?