

# 1 Thessalonians 2:17 to 3:13

- I. Intro
  - A. Greece, Maccombers, being forced to depart, us canceling our trip
- II. Situation
  - A. 1:1-1:10, Paul reminisces about their growth
  - B. 2:1-2:16, Paul reminds them of his ministry and intentions (defending his apolocity)
  - C. 2:17-3:13, Paul defends his absence, ensuring that they do not misinterpret it as a lack of care
- III. *[17] But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, [18] because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. [19] For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? [20] For you are our glory and joy.*
  - A. Paul's time with the Thessalonians was brief, but he wants them to know that this is not caused by disinterest or a cold heart
    - 1. In the last 1.5 years, many have had to leave their missionary posts. Visa appointments were canceled or denied. Mission agencies demanded people come home.
  - B. Torn away literally means "orphaned"
    - 1. Remember, that Paul didn't want to leave - persecution tore him away, like a family being ripped apart b/c of war
    - 2. Paul's framework for discipleship and making disciples is family
    - 3. For Paul, this felt like having your children ripped away from you in a time when you couldn't check on them, check in on them, or visit them
  - C. They wanted to go, but they could not. This led to a feeling of disruption, frustration, and powerlessness
    - 1. I know that this is how the Maccombers felt when they had to leave
      - a) Riots... COVID... Government...
    - 2. For the refugees in the camp and contacts on the ground, this could be misinterpreted
      - a) Maybe this was just a spiritual high for Paul and crew... Maybe they didn't actually care... Maybe we were tricked...
  - D. Satan prevented him from visiting with them on multiple occasions
    - 1. And then he fills that frustration with doubts, concerns
    - 2. Satan is the Father of Lies who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy
      - a) He wants to destroy Paul's ministry
      - b) He wants to destroy the Thessalonians' faith
      - c) He does this with lies, deceit
  - E. He couldn't wait to get to them, though, because they (the people of God in Thessaloniki) are his hope... his joy... his crown of boasting when Jesus returns (a key theme in 1 Thessalonians)
    - 1. Think about each of these things through a parenting lens

- a) My joy → The joy of seeing your family prosper and grow
    - b) My hope → The hope knowing your family is there no matter what
    - c) My boast → Parents proud of their kids
  - 2. This is how we should feel about the people we are developing spiritually
  - 3. Who are your spiritual kids? Not that you brought them to faith, but you are passing on what you have learned to them (even if it's not a lot)
- IV. *[1] Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, [2] and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, [3] that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. [4] For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. [5] For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.*
- A. This was Paul's process of establishing new works... Go... find... coach...
    - 1. He didn't intentionally orphan people. He cared deeply. He wanted to see them grow into maturity
  - B. He would normally go himself, but Paul sent Timothy and Silas to them b/c it was them or nothing. It wasn't his preference or ideal, but he had to do something b/c it was like not knowing if your children were alive
    - 1. establish them (equip, reinforce like scaffolding)
    - 2. exhort them in their faith (correct, encourage)
    - 3. Specifically, in light of the afflictions (persecution, politics, family, etc) - knowing it will happen to all who desire to live a godly life
  - C. Like Paul, we have been ripped from some of our global opportunities
    - 1. Not willingly, but beyond our own control
    - 2. We have tried to send texts, emails, zooms, voice memos and the like to stay as connected as possible
  - D. But it's just not the same. We all know this. Emailing your family isn't as seeing your family. Especially if they are going through a hard time!
    - 1. Here they are facing persecution. Paul is worried about them!
- V. *[6] But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—[7] for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. [8] For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. [9] For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, [10] as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?*
- A. Timothy returned with a positive report to everyone's joy and excitement!
  - B. Like a parent who finally gets word that their child is safe and sound... like a sigh of relief after a season of great difficulty... this is how Paul feels
  - C. Paul places remarkable value in their relationship, and it is encouraging that his affection is not unrequited. They do - in fact - feel the same way that he does

- D. Despite his own hardship and inability to do what he wants to do, he takes joy, hope, and comfort knowing that they are “with him” in Spirit
  - E. I love v8: we live if you are standing fast!
    - 1. Isn't that the cry of every godly parent, “As long as my child is walking with the Lord, I can be at peace!” This is our great concern for our children and for our spiritual children
    - 2. John says, “I have no greater joy than knowing my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 1:14)
  - F. For us, we keep rejoicing over what technology allows us to do w/ our global partners, but it's not the same. We yearn to go. We yearn to send. We yearn to reconnect. What can we do even when we can't do these things? Pray to reconnect
  - G. Fill up what is lacking b/c of a hasty departure - to seize the opportunity
- VI. *[11] Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, [12] and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, [13] so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*
- A. Since Paul has yet to be with them, he always prays for them
  - B. Paul prays... (will unpack this next week)
    - 1. Direct us to you...
    - 2. Increase your love for one another
    - 3. Establish you as blameless = walk in holiness
  - C. Reminds me of James 1:27, Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
    - 1. Love through genuine service and holiness. Not one or the other, both
- VII. Some Big Thoughts
- A. Think about Paul's heart for the Thessalonians. Do you feel that way about anyone spiritually? Do you yearn to invest in people in that kind of way?
    - 1. Maybe your DG that hasn't felt normal in a year, a community in desperate need of the gospel, or an opportunity for ministry that was lost
    - 2. For Paul this isn't just an opportunity for work, this is a deep longing in his soul for people to grow and mature, like a parent and a child
  - B. God has given us family relationships to help us understand discipleship relationships.**
  - C. We are relational people made in the image of a relational God. There is nothing natural about separation or isolation.**
  - D. We are supposed to find joy, hope, and even boasting in one another.**
    - 1. If I ask you: What is your joy? What is your hope? What is your boasting before the Lord?
    - 2. You would probably say, “Jesus, of course” - and that is a fine answer, and certainly true, but it is not the entirety of the answer
      - a) Jesus is the head, but the church - his people - are the body

- b) Paul's goal is to see the bride purified, prepared, and presented to her Groom
- c) Paul's joy is in the bride of Christ made holy, filled with love, and ready for her Groom.
- d) Paul's hope is that the Groom will come back for his ready bride.
- e) Paul finds JOY in the people of God
- f) Paul finds HOPE in the people of God loving one another
- g) Paul finds BOASTING, like a proud parent, in the people of God
- 3. The church is the body of Jesus - to love Jesus is to love the church, and to love his people is to show him love as well
- 4. The discipleship relationships we have together (not just your DG, but all of our relationships) should give us joy. Do yours? Why not? What is holding you back from connecting with people? Not waiting for them to connect with you, but what is holding YOU back?
- E. Timothy was coached by Paul, developed by Paul, loved by Paul
  - 1. Do you know what he said to Timothy?
  - 2. *2 Timothy 2:2, "And what you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well."*
  - 3. Who are you engaging with like that? Who are your Timothys? Who are your "true children in the faith" like Paul says? Who do you pine for relationally and yearn to pour into them?
  - 4. A few weeks back we asked you to make a list... Did you? How is it going? Are some of these your Timothys?
  - 5. Remember: relationships are the grounds for discipleship. Paul has made this super clear. Who are you in relationship with and how can you become more like Paul, more like Jesus, with your relationships?

- VIII. ANNOUNCEMENT: Certainly we can relate to Paul as we think about the last year feeling ripped away from people, places, and opportunities
- A. At the bare minimum this should have caused you to long for one another
  - B. The sigh of relief when we got to see loved ones... got to gather...
  - C. Over the last year +, we have maintained and fostered our relationships in Greece, much like Paul has talked about here
  - D. We haven't just viewed these as work opportunities, but friendships. We have prayed with and for each other, observed Hadi get married on zoom, and even helped purchase furniture for his apartment
  - E. Last week, Hadi called us up with an opportunity to go back and see our friend and reconnect with the work
  - F. He invited us on a "Luke 10 trip" → Going like Paul... looking for spiritual people... making contacts... coaching and continuing to build in relationship
    - 1. This is what we should be doing THERE and in CMC and HERE
  - G. We talked details with his team and our elders and pulled the trigger on tickets - short window of opportunity and we don't want to miss it.

- H. Two days afterward, a wrench was thrown into the gears and now Hadi cannot travel around Greece w/ us looking for opportunities. Torn away... again...
- I. So now we are at a crossroads... do we still go? What is the Lord doing?
  - 1. Perhaps we could go, find a contact and pour into them - much like Paul w/ the Thessalonians. Indeed, Paul in all his ministries (c.f. Timothy)

## TABLE TALK

1. Where do you find your joy?
2. What do you look to for your hope?
3. What is your crown of boasting before the Lord?
4. In whom are you investing? How can you change your habits and perspective to have the people of God be a primary focus of your daily life?