

1THESSALONIANS 2:17-20 "Our Hope, Our Joy, Our Lord Jesus!"

**1 Thessalonians 2:17-20** <sup>17</sup> But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and *yet* Satan hindered us. <sup>19</sup> 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? <sup>20</sup> For you are our glory and joy.

By way of reminder this letter to the Thessalonians was written by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, during his stay in Corinth which, we're told in Acts 18:11, was a year and a half. In fact, during that span of time he wrote at least two letters to the Thessalonians and those are the two we have in our bibles. And so, the Thessalonian believers were very special to Paul.

It was very likely that it was their appreciation for Paul and the message of hope in Christ he brought them that he was responding to, and was compelled to want to nurture them like the newborn babes they were in Christ.

And we see this attitude expressed very well in 1TH 2:7-8 "but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. <sup>8</sup> We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

And it's because of that love for them that Paul grieved over the idea that he was forced to leave them after a riot broke out in Thessalonica. Luke records that incident for us.

ACT 17:5-10 "But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. <sup>6</sup> But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, <sup>7</sup> and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." <sup>8</sup> When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. <sup>9</sup> Then they made Jason and the others

post bond and let them go. 10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea."

That's not what Paul desired for the church there, but he didn't have a choice at the time. And it would seem that he does not now have a choice to go back there.

1TH 2:17-18 "But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, did, again and again--but Satan stopped us."

There is nothing more frustrating than to feel entirely helpless in a situation, where you're forced to accept the problem before you and simply deal with it the best you can by God's strength.

That's true of you and me and it was even true of the apostle Paul. He evidently made a number of attempts to go back to them and yet all of his plans failed, and we'll look at that in a moment. But, let's go back and look at verse 17 and get a flavor for Paul's feelings at the time.

"But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought)...."

The phrase "torn away from you" in the NIV is translated "having being taken from you" in the KJV and NAU.

The Greek word used is *aporphanizo*, which is derived from two Greek words: *apo*, which means away or away from, and *orphanos* which is orphan and where we get our English word.

And the idea here is that Paul was saying we were *orphaned away from you*.

F.F. Bruce comments: "They felt like parents who had lost their children, but happily (they hoped) only for the time being, and only as regards bodily presence, not as regards abiding inward affection."

That hope and that love would not cease. Paul continued to hope and pray that he would be able to visit them again. His heartfelt feeling was that despite the reality of their separation he was sure that one day they would be rejoined. Hopefully soon.

But, even Paul knew the stark reality of warfare, and the casualties which result, even if this warfare is of the spiritual kind. You see

war will not only separate people, it will often times keep anyone from going back in for their rescue.

It wasn't as though Paul didn't try. The end of verse 17 tells us this. "... out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you."

I can picture Paul sitting down with Silas and the brethren in Corinth working out different plans to get to Thessalonica safely. They may have even sent messengers ahead to secure safe houses when they arrived and worked out times and dates for arrivals, possibly in the cover of night.

Paul may not have been a military strategist, but you can bank on him using his keen mind to form plans which would have rivaled any military covert operation to get to his desired result, which was simply to encourage the saints in Thessalonica face to face.

But, despite his efforts, notice what Paul concedes in 1TH 2:18 "For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, did, again and again--but Satan stopped us."

He doesn't concede defeat, he simply concedes that he's been stopped. It's a setback, but it's not the end of the world. But he also admits that the one behind this blockade is Satan.

Now, why is that important? First, Paul teaches us here that Satan is a person, he's not a theory of evil which the ancient Greeks purported which, by the way, the Thessalonians adhered to prior to their conversion, being part of the Greek world and thought at that time.

In fact, Satan, who is a very powerful angel, is referred to throughout the scriptures in a variety of descriptive names: Abaddon and Apollyn which both mean destroyer. He's called the accuser of the brethren, the adversary, the deceiver of the whole world, the great dragon, an enemy, the evil one, a liar, a murderer, the prince of the power of the air, the tempter and a variety of other names.

As an angel, even though one who has been cut off from God for his rebellion against his Creator, he does possess power. He couldn't do all that he's done without power. And yet anything which he possesses has been given to him by God, his creator.

He wasn't created evil, he chose his path and as a result he has been condemned by God and one day will be thrown into the lake

of fire which will be his punishment forever. This is the same place every human being will spend eternity who has rejected the Creator and the Savior of this world.

Whereas, every believer who has repented of his sin and embraced Jesus Christ by faith will behold the face of his Creator forever, those in hell will behold the face and torment of the one who is called Satan, forever.

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible makes this comment which is quite true. "Satan does not operate in isolation but is the head of a well organized kingdom in which his subjects exercise delegated responsibility under his direction. He is the leader of a vast, compact organization of spirit-beings, his angels. (Mat.25:41; Rev.12:7). As the prince of the power of the air (Eph.2:2), he skillfully directs an organized host of wicked spirits in the heavenly's who do his bidding (6:12). The fallen angels who gave their allegiance to Satan (Rev.12:4,7,9) apparently retain their ranks, dignity, and titles which were divinely given them, and they willingly and whole-heartedly give obedience to the rule of Satan." (Mat.12:28,29).

Our foe is not a pushover who operates some rag-tag unorganized weak force with no purpose in mind. He is the most brilliant being created by God, but who, in his rebellion, has become the most heinous and destructive enemy of this world and God's people.

But never forget this. He is only a created being. He is not the co-equal with God, nor does he possess attributes which many people give him credit for.

For example, he is not divine, which means he is not God. He is not omnipresent and therefore cannot be everywhere at the same time, like God. However, through his army of angels he keeps pretty good tabs on everything going on in the world.

He is not omniscient like God, who alone knows all things. In fact, if Satan were all knowing he wouldn't have messed up so many times in the course of history. For example, he made many efforts to destroy the Christ child through agents like King Herod, and then when he thought he had won the victory by orchestrating our Lord's arrest and subsequent crucifixion, he found out to his dismay that he was only being used by God to assure our victory and was publicly humiliated in the process.

As powerful as Satan is, even he admits his limitations.

Job 1:7-12 "The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." 8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD."

As much as Satan hated Job for loving God he couldn't touch him until the Lord gave him permission. And he only allowed Satan to come against Job so that through him God would ultimately be glorified through his faithfulness and obedience, and again Satan would be shown to be the fool that he is.

Interestingly enough, Satan is often times used by God as His instrument to chasten and correct erring saints, which is designed again to strengthen the saints against further attacks from Satan.

LUK 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

When speaking of spiritual immorality among the Corinthians Paul writes: "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." (1CO 5:5)

Paul once gave instruction to Timothy in 1TI 1:18-20 "Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, 19 holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. 20 Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme."

This, by the way, shows us what God thinks of the rebellion of His people and the measures He will go to bring us back to Him and teach us that He wants every part of our lives.

But, here's the hope we have in our Savior; in the cross of Jesus Christ, our Lord broke the power of Satan over His people and has delivered us from the dominion of sin and its effect on us if we have come to Him for the forgiveness of our sin by faith.

That doesn't mean we won't be tempted by the "tempter", but it does mean we don't have to submit to sin, nor do we have to walk in fear, because we no longer are a part of Satan's kingdom, nor his power over us.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, but our own self-seeking attitudes will stunt our growth in the Lord and will capture God's attention who, we are told, is a jealous God. And why shouldn't He be? He gave us His Son as a ransom for our sin by loving us with an everlasting love and delivering us from the grasp of Satan. He now desires our full allegiance to Him and He even provides His own power through His Holy Spirit who resides in the life of every believer.

Satan can do nothing without God's permission. And even though Paul knew this he still grieves over the blockade Satan is obviously allowed to put up to keep him from the Thessalonians.

Many commentators suggest that the blockade may have come in the form of the magistrates in Thessalonica threatening to further hurt the believers in that city if Paul came back. And this is often how Satan will work. He will use people and things to hurt, and try to destroy the body of Christ. He will also come against all of humanity, whom God created, and try to wreak havoc.

This present situation in Somalia is getting a lot of news and the principal players are shown to be the war lords who are causing the problem of starvation by their greed as they take the food by force for themselves to sell to the people.

But, I'm here to tell you that the real architect behind everything that is happening in Somalia is Satan as he drives those people into despair. And yet even in that disaster, God is able to allow such destruction to cause people to look up to Him for salvation.

Many of those American soldiers, who received Christ as their Lord and Savior in another disaster in Kuwait and Iraq, are now able to share their faith with the Somali's. We may not understand it all, but God is at work and the gates of hell will not prevail against our Lord's plans.

Satan may be allowed to thwart our efforts at times, even as he did with Paul, but God is not unaware or weak when it comes to ultimate victory. As most of you are aware, God gave me different prophecies in the beginning of this work with Calvary Chapel, and He told me that Satan would try to sift us like wheat and that his attacks would come against me and this work.

And you know what, Satan has done just that, but the hope God gave me in all of this was in Him conveying that He would protect us and this work, and that the enemy would not be allowed to have the victory.

The tough times always look bleak, but God has another reason for these trials. He is conforming us into His image and giving us strength and perseverance for the work which is ahead, and believe me, we're going to need His strength.

1TH 2:19-20 "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

To Paul, Satan was a foe who happened to be an inconvenience at this time. But, Paul never underestimated the hatred and intensity of Satan as he came against the church and tried to keep him from taking the Gospel to the unsaved.

This was his real desire, to tell people that they didn't have to suffer the same consequences as Satan who would be bound in hell forever.

He wanted them to know that sin has a high price tag that they would personally have to pay for if they didn't come to Christ to let Him pay for their sin and free them from that penalty, which is eternal separation from God in hell with Satan forever.

That was no joke with Paul. He gave his life as a martyr to take that message to the world. It's a message we have the privilege to share with the world as well. Yeah, Satan thwarted Paul in this instance, but he doesn't dwell on it. Look at how he goes from the reality of Satan's attacks to the sobering reality of his mission of hope.

1TH 2:19-20 "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

What could have been a depressing situation for Paul turns out to be a reason for rejoicing. He must have thought, if Satan would go through all this trouble of keeping me from going back to Thessalonica I must be on the right track.

And in an odd sort of way I can praise God in the ways that Satan has come against this work. A band of a few committed people who love the Lord and desire to serve Him by taking the gospel out into the community. What threat could we be to the kingdom of darkness? What does Satan know that we don't?

We must be on the right track. And I'm certain we are because the Lord is the One directing our steps, and that becomes a threat to Satan because he hates it when people get serious with God.

He doesn't mind if Christians are "religious". In fact, he encourages that sort of thing. He wants us to be comfortable in our pews, sounding pious and holy as long as we're not telling and showing people that God is real in our lives and that He alone is Savior, and that He alone is Lord of our lives.

This has been Satan's problem all along. He wants our allegiance and for us to follow his cleverly devised plans. But we, like Christ, must be able to say and live what our Lord told Satan in the desert.

MAT 4:10 "Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

James put it this way in JAM 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

We must be disciplined enough to submit ourselves to our God and His word and the means to grow in this grace as we resist the temptations of the evil one.

Don't mix or confuse your allegiance. You can't serve God and the world. But, I'll tell you, Satan will do his best to keep you off balance, and to encourage you to keep one foot in this world and in sin, so that you won't be an effective servant for Jesus Christ.

Your part in the Kingdom of God is neither a joke, or an option. It's a privilege with the responsibility of knowing that we're serving and glorifying our King of kings and Lord of lords. But keep this in mind, if you're simply playing games with God you are playing into the hands of the enemy. That's neither a wise or safe move.

Your salvation is precious. To Paul there was nothing more precious than to know that these Thessalonians were no longer in the grasp of the enemy. His joy was based on that.

1TH 2:19-20 "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

Everything he did for the saints, whether the Thessalonians, the Galatians, the Romans or whomever, he did for Christ. And he knew that one day he would stand before his risen Savior. In fact, he anticipated the return of Christ from heaven and he wanted to be ready to present these people to the Lord as his crown which made his ministry worth any attack from Satan.

We look for joy in a lot of places, many of which are misplaced. We have a tendency to measure joy in terms of what we have obtained, as though the one who dies with the most toys, wins.

Sometimes we will even measure our joy in something as noble as getting involved in God's work, but when the struggles come we may revert back to those things which are not as troublesome and demanding.

I'll just send somebody the money and let them do the work. There's nothing wrong with supporting Godly works, but when it becomes easier to write a check than to get personally involved in the lives of people, who need to know that they don't have to spend eternity separated from God because Christ came into this world to die for the sin of His people, and who rose from the dead to secure the victory, the question needs to be asked, "what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?"

Can we say, "is it not even you", whoever the "you" may happen to be?

Not all of us will be evangelists, not all of us will be teachers, not all of us will be Pastors, but all of us in Christ have the love He's given us, and we have His Spirit to direct us and guide us in the way He wants us to go.

Ultimately, God is asking of you and me what He asked of Paul in Acts 26:18-19 "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

You may be an invalid and your only way of helping people is to write checks or pray. Then do it. You may love to show hospitality. Then open your home to people and show the love of Christ and give them the greatest news this world has ever heard.

You may have the gift of mercy. Visit the sick, or those in jail and give them hope that their present burdens can be placed on the One who came to set the captives free and give strength to faint-hearted.

What I'm saying is, go to God and ask Him how you can get involved with His work. Now, He's set a work before us in the form of reaching out to the lost in our community with an outreach starting the beginning of the year.

Pray how you can be a part of that and come talk to me. I'd be more than happy to help you in any way I can to equip you for God's service. That's why I'm here and why God has placed me in this work.

Because you see you are my joy, and my crown in which I will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes. Indeed, you are my glory and joy."

Start looking for ways in which you can say the same thing about the work God has for you. And if you know what that is do it with all the strength God is able to give you, and give Him the glory and rejoice in the crown He has for you.

Here's my prayer for you. It's the same prayer Paul had for the Ephesians:

EPH 1:17-20 "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

And let me close with a benediction Paul gave to the Thessalonians:

1TH 5:23-24 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."