

## **Timothy's Report**

Call to Worship: Psalm 34:1-10

1st Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

Hymn #89- *Come Thou Almighty King*

Hymn Insert- *You are My All in All*

Hymn #487- *Faith of Our Fathers*

### **Introduction:**

Paul has been unburdening his heart about the distance he had gone to try to get back to the Thessalonians, when he and his companions were chased out of there prematurely. Finally, when he could not take it anymore, he sent Timothy to establish and encourage the fledgling church in their faith. And furthermore, upon his return, Timothy would be able to report back to Paul, concerning how the Thessalonians were doing, since they were continuing to face opposition and persecution, right from the time of their new birth in Christ. As a loving spiritual parent, Paul was anxious to know how the Thessalonians were doing, and whether or not they had fallen prey to the tempter, who would seek to prevent them from establishing a church there in heathen Thessalonica.

Well, this morning, Paul will move on to reveal what had happened when Timothy returned to Paul, to report about the spiritual condition of the Thessalonian brethren.

### **I. Timothy's Report**

Last time, we ended with verse 5, "For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain." And now, in verses 6 and 7, we read, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you-- therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith."

And so, Timothy had gone to the Thessalonians, and had returned to Paul and Silas with a good report, which alleviated the anxious thoughts of the Apostle Paul, concerning whether or not the tempter had succeeded in driving them away from the truth that they had embraced in Christ. And notice the general sense of the report that was given, which brought encouragement

to Paul. And notice the critical elements that Timothy had found exhibited by the Thessalonian converts, when he had gotten there:

1- Their faith was in tact. Although they were being greatly tested; although they were being persecuted and suffering affliction for their commitment to Christ and the Gospel, they were not shaken away from their faith in Christ. They did not compromise or fall away. Rather, they clung to Christ, refusing to lay down the cross that was allotted to them, in their part in the Gospel. They continued in the practice of Christian living, which is consistent with a sincere profession of faith. They remained steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, fully convinced that their labor in the Lord, was not in vain.

2- Their faith was confirmed most evidently by their ongoing love for one another ["Timothy brought us good news of your faith and love..."]. Though they were greatly persecuted, they did not shift their attention away from each other and onto themselves. No, rather they continued to love and serve one another, growing together in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They persevered in the very traits that Paul had witnessed when he was there for a short time, and which he mentioned earlier in chapter 1 (Read 1:2-4).

And so, their faith sustained its heartbeat, evidencing the genuineness of it, and this was confirmed by the ways in which they took an interest in, served, met the needs of, and ultimately loved one another.

3- And finally, Paul was encouraged to hear from Timothy, that even as Paul and his companions were longing to get back to see the Thessalonians, the Thessalonians had greatly desired to see them as well. The positive thoughts and good remembrance of being together were mutual. The affection was not one-sided. Rather, they all shared the same desire of seeing each other again (vs. 6b).

And so, this, the general description of Timothy's report (that their faith and love were in tact, and that they had a mutual desire to see Paul and his companions), was very encouraging to the Apostle Paul, to say the least. In fact, he says that they were comforted concerning the faith of the Thessalonians. The good spiritual condition of the Thessalonian church brought great joy

and encouragement to their own souls. Listen to how Paul builds on this in verses 7 and following:

"Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress (brought about, both by the persecution that they themselves continually faced and the unshakeable desire to know how the Thessalonians were doing), we were comforted concerning you by your faith." "A large pail of water was poured on the burning fire of our own agony and trials, and we found relief in your wellbeing and progress." Verse 8, "For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord."

Again, we find a further superlative confirmation of the Apostle Paul's love and heart for the Thessalonian sheep, which was thoroughly grounded in his love for the Thessalonian's Shepherd, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. [Read 2:19-20 and then 3:8 again]. How far do we need to go or stretch, brethren, to see so clearly that Paul's interests, glory and joy; indeed his very life was tied into the wellbeing, progress and prosperity of Christ's church. "Timothy's report of your perseverance comforted us in our afflictions, because our supreme interest; indeed, our very lives are bound to your progress in the faith. As you persevere, it is rejuvenation; it is life to our very souls. And should you fall away, it would be a bullet to the heart; indeed, death to our souls. We would be crushed with grief and despair. And so, even though we ourselves continually suffer great afflictions and persecutions; even though, we bear the marks of Christ's sufferings in our body, the comfort, which we receive by your standing fast in the Lord, reinvigorates us with great motivation and strength to press on. We are comforted in our afflictions by your progress!"

Moving into verses 9 and 10, he adds, "For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?"

Here, the Apostle erupts with a rhetorical question, which will lead into a glorious benediction that we will consider next time, Lord willing. Here, he expresses the emotional thrill of his soul in words, and it's like he lit off a mortar at the beginning of his thought, and it has shot up into the sky, blowing up in all of its color and beauty, concluding in this expression of exultation. Again, it is rhetorical. "How can we possibly thank God enough; what words could ever sufficiently express how thankful we are to God for all of the undeserved joy that He has

given us, for your sake before our God. We are elated with an overwhelming joy, and no thanks could ever suffice to express how grateful to God we are for this joy that we have in you!" "Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!" [Ex: Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol," at the end, laughing and rejoicing over blessing others... "You don't deserve such joy! But I just can't help it!]

And finally, Paul concludes his thought; the glowing flurries of the mortar float down, as he reiterates how strongly he desires to see them. Again, hear the superlative language. "Night and day (continually), praying *exceedingly* (fervently, with great, sweat producing expression) that we might see your face, (most particularly) to perfect what is lacking in your faith." "We want to add more to what you have already received. We want to help you onward, to fill you with more spiritual resources and blessings that will strengthen your faith, so that you might prosper further!" Obviously, this goes right along with what the Apostle has been saying about the Thessalonians being his glory and joy, and him living by their standing fast in the Lord. Where your heart is, you will find yourself investing your time and resources; you will find yourself sacrificing of yourself, for that which means most to you. Clearly, Paul, who might very well be consumed with his own welfare right now (his afflictions were great and ongoing), yet, was most concerned with investing more good into the Lord's church.

Does Paul not remind us of Christ, Himself, here, brethren? In fact, was this really Paul here? Were these the natural affections of the proud Pharisee by nature? Of course not. This was Christ in Paul, wasn't it? This was a glorious reflection of the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit of the One who washed the feet of His wayward disciples, as He was preparing to bear their sins at the cross! Such an unnatural, selfless concern for others, at his own great expense, is nothing short of Christ in Paul, and not Paul himself. It is God's glorious workmanship in Paul, conforming him into the One, whose Spirit was now at work in Him!

Consider these two verses, brethren:

1- Galatians 2:20- "I (Paul) have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

2- 1 Corinthians 15:9-10- "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

## **II. Closing Thoughts and Applications**

Having finished looking at our main text for this morning, brethren, let us then conclude our time by considering a few closing thoughts and applications:

1) Recognize again, the critical necessity of *perseverance* in the Christian life. It was wonderful to have witnessed the original confession of faith and commitment of the Thessalonians when Paul was among them. And yet, because of the present, ongoing tribulations, Paul was concerned about the possibility of the Thessalonians having been led astray by the tempter. Paul knew the critical importance of perseverance, as a true mark of a living faith. This did not eliminate his excitement at the beginning, but he still knew that ultimately, time would reveal what was really in the heart. That is why he states in 2:19, that his hope, joy and crown of rejoicing, was to see them faithful in the presence of Christ's return. And that is why he states in verse 8 that he (and his companions) lived, if they *stood fast* in the Lord.

Clearly, all of these things show; indeed the very tone of the letter shows that Paul was concerned not merely with a profession of faith, but with a persevering faith. And so, brethren, let this all the more spur us on, not in an anxious sense, but with a fervent sense, nonetheless, to finish the race that is set before us. If you're still breathing, brethren (and as I look out this morning, it seems that most of us are), then we have yet, at least, another lap ahead of us! Let us continue to run that race with great determination, unwilling to sit down until we are at the finish line, with the crown of glory placed upon our heads, by God Himself! Don't look back, brethren, but rather, run as one who is seeking the crown! Retirement in the kingdom of God doesn't come until we are in the presence of Christ! Persevere, stand fast, and if you have drifted off in any sense, get back in the race, praying for God to grant you the grace and strength to finish well! Too many are content to tell of the zeal and commitment they once had at the beginning! Where are you now? That's what counts!

2) Marvel again, over the heart of Paul here, but most particularly, in how it reflects and reveals the glorious heart of Christ toward us. When you see the sincere, selfless, sacrificial love that Paul has for these people, whom he knew for less than a month, it ought to jump out at us, as profound and supernatural. But brethren, in laying hold; or at least attempting to lay hold of that great love which Paul is expressing here, recognize in the glory of what you behold, that that is a partial expression of the infinite love of Christ, which He has for us!

Yes, Paul knew them for a few short weeks, but Christ loved us while we were His enemies, brethren! When you were at your most rebellious and sinful peak, in all of your life; when you were sticking your middle finger up to the face of almighty, all holy, all light, all pure, eternal God, as it were, He still loved you to the full, and had every bit of determination to save you, as He had before the foundation of the world! And He crushed and shamed and killed His own Son to secure your salvation! And Christ willingly embraced the cross and all of its horror for you!

An eye dropper full of that love, is what we see here in Paul. We are the glory and joy of Christ, brethren! Would He dare call us His bride, his body, and the apple of His eye, if it were not so? Indeed, He rejoices over us! He is ever mindful of us! You see, when you take a good and honest look at your natural corruption and depravity; when you see the truth of who you really are in Adam; when you come face to face with the undeniable truth of your defilement, you can't possibly make sense of it all! All you can do is say, "I know it must be true! This is the true character of our God, and it comes with no regret!" And in some amazing way, as you process this, by grace; as you peer at the reality and try to drink some of the waters of such truth, it creates an incomprehensible, unexplainable ball of energy within you (right at the core!), that shakes you with a violent sense of zeal and excitement, leading you to fall down and worship, and compelling you to say, "Here I am, Lord! Send me!" "Woe to me, if I hide this truth!" "Woe to me, if I smother it out with the dung of this world!" "Woe to me, if I fail to preach Christ and His Gospel!"

3) Brethren, if it is truly our desire to be "Christ-like," then let us understand that prayerfully pursuing this type of a heart, ought to be the substance of our striving. Often times, biblical terms get thrown around carelessly, but we must be a people, who carefully define those

terms, if we are to live the Christian life with any sense of genuine integrity. I can't tell you how many times, I have heard even unbelievers say, "Oh, I love Jesus so much," and "I really love God," while having no intention of understanding, let alone doing, the very things that Christ and God desire. You see, brethren, what it comes down to is this: When we pray to God, asking Him to make us more like Christ, we have to understand that what we are really saying is, "Lord, make me a man/woman of sacrifice, who considers and puts the interests of others above my own." "Help me to embrace a life of discomfort, and to be content with less, so that I might give myself to Christ, by giving myself to His cause, His purposes and His church.

So, so many Christians want to please God, but on their own terms and not His. We want to give, without feeling it. We want to sacrifice, when it is convenient, which isn't really sacrifice. We want to serve and be useful, without denying our own natural desires and interests. We want to be conformed to Christ, without experiencing pain or discomfort. We want glory and heaven, without giving up this life and the things of this world. But brethren, serving God, if sincere, must be on *His* terms. [Ill. Can't make kites in a boat factory, and expect to please the boss, even though we prefer to make kites]

And so, brethren, I say all of this to simply state that we must get down to the details with our Christianity, rather than, shield ourselves in undefined generalities. We must ask ourselves, "What do our love and service and worship of God actually look like, and does it fit the biblical description of each?" If we truly want to be "Christ-like," then it behooves us to do this. And hopefully, we have all the motivation in the world, at the cross, to take pains to do this.

4) Finally, to the non-Christian here this morning, what does all of this mean to you? Do you recognize the great privilege God has given you, to be here on any given occasion, to hear the Word of life put before you? Don't miss it!

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!