

1  **Hard times are coming**

1 Thessalonians 3:1-8

2  **1 Thessalonians 3:1-4**

*So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. <sup>2</sup> We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, <sup>3</sup> so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. <sup>4</sup> In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.*

3  **1 Thessalonians 3:5-6**

*<sup>5</sup> For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. <sup>6</sup> But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.*

4  **1 Thessalonians 3:7-8**

*<sup>7</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>8</sup> For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.*

5  **Stephen Foster**6  **HARD TIMES COME AGAIN NO MORE**

- A tough life:
  - Struggled financially most of his adult life
  - In 1860, moved to New York city in the midst of his difficult times
  - Addicted to alcohol
  - Wife left him in 1861
  - Spent the rest of his life in debt
- His last song was *Hard Times Come Again No More*

7  **Hard times come again no more**8  **HARD TIMES SHAKE US UP**

*vv. 1-3a: So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. <sup>2</sup> We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, <sup>3</sup> so that no one would be unsettled by these trials.*

9  **Paul's ministry at Thessalonica**

- Brief and characterized by persecution
- He preached the gospel, won souls to Christ and established a fledgling church.
- He had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the state of those new believers and encourage them in the faith.
- 1 Thessalonians is Paul's response to the Thessalonians after he had heard Timothy's report.

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#### 10 Paul's Hard Times

- v. 1: *So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.*
- Paul said that he was like a mother and like a father to these new Christians.
- The heart of a true pastor – a true shepherd – who does not abandon his flock.
- *"left by ourselves"* = *abandonment* or *bereavement*. Paul felt abandoned, or like a bereaved husband or wife who had lost their loved one.
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#### 11 The hard times of the Thessalonians

- *"Trials"* carries the idea of "to press," "squash," "rub," "hem in," "to crush."
- Because they believed in the Jesus Paul had preached, the mob inciting violence against them was a constant threat.
- Their threat was the same as many Christians in the world today who have to meet secretly and are constantly subject to arrest and imprisonment for believing in Jesus and preaching the gospel.

#### 12 Wag the Tail

- *"unsettled"* = "Wag the Tail"
- Dogs use their tails to communicate:
- What does that have to do with HARD TIMES of the Thessalonians?
- Jews were going to these new Christians and *"wagging the tail,"* pretending to be their friends

#### 13 Hard times are appointed

- v. 3b – *For you know quite well that we are destined for them (hard times).*
- A verb that means "to lie," "to be laid" or "set in place."
- Paul's way of saying, "These hard times were placed here by God."

#### 14 Robert's email

A man by the name of Dermot Vardiman is coming to haul away the trash behind our church . . . today. He asked if we could pray for his 5-year-old daughter, Sage Victoria Vardiman. Sage has spinal muscle atrophy (SMA) type 1. . . . It is something like muscular dystrophy except that it attacks muscles connected to the spine, making it impossible to breath after a while. It appears when the victim is a child – usually by the age of 6 months. Sage is on life support now."

#### 15 No accidents!

- Seminary professor: "For the child of God, there are no accidents, only incidents."
- Incidents–yes -- Troubles – yes -- Heartache – yes
- Difficulty – yes -- Disappointment – yes
- Death – yes -- Loss – yes -- Failure – yes
- But Accidents? No!
- There are no accidents with God. Only incidents that are appointed by Him for our good and His glory.
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16  **Hard times are to be expected**

v. 4 – *In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.*

Regarding trials, two truths pop out before my eyes:

1. Trials are the common lot of every Christian.
2. Your particular trial doesn't matter as much as how you respond to it.

17  **Hard times can lead to temptation**

- v. 5 – *For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.*
- Satan's special "ministry" reserved just for Christians -- Tempting believers to turn away from God during hard times.
- Think about Job

18  **Job 1:10-11**

*Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But now, stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will surely curse You to Your face.*

19  **How does the devil tempt us in hard times?**

1. He tempts us to doubt God's goodness.
2. He tempts us to retaliate against others with anger and resentment.
3. He tempts us to give in to despair and discouragement.

20  **The ultimate act of desperation**

We give up on our faith in God altogether

- Paul's fear for the Thessalonians
- Departing from the faith happens all too often to Christians because HARD TIMES eventually wear us down and we just give up.
- We begin the long slide in the wrong direction away from God.

21  **Hard times can be overcome by faith**

- v. 6 – *But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.*
- Paul plainly says that we can overcome our trials by faith.

22  **What kind of faith does Paul have in mind?**

- Faith in God's Character — that he is good and makes no mistake
- Faith in God's Word — that it is true no matter what happens to us
- Faith in God's Purpose — that he is conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ

23  **Faith - 2**

- Faith in God's Promise — that he will never give us more than we can bear

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- Faith in God's Promise — that he will never give us more than we can bear
- Faith in God's Presence — that He is with us in the darkest moments of life
- Faith in God's Power — that he can deliver us from every temptation

24  **Faith - 3**

- V. 6, *Timothy . . . has brought good news about your faith. . .*
- "Your faith" is plural.
- So many believers struggle because they try to handle their problems alone.
- But God never intended that you should face the HARD TIMES by yourself

25  **Hebrews 10: 24-25**

*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: <sup>25</sup> Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

26  **Hard times will comfort others as we stand firm**

*vv. 7-8: <sup>7</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>8</sup> For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.*

27  **Others are watching you right now**

- The great Apostle himself drew strength from the courage of these new believers.
- He says, "I can face my HARD TIMES because I see how well you are facing yours."