

Established and Encouraged in the Faith

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Halifax: 27 August, 10:30 AM

Introduction

I cannot launch into today's sermon in Thessalonians without first reminding you of what we looked at last week.

- It is foundational to what we are looking at this week.
- In fact, the five verses I am preaching from today, chapter 3, verses 1-5, were actually part of the passage I read last week.
 - Last week, I started in chapter 2, verse 17, and read through chapter 3, verse 5.

And because what we did last week is so tied together with what we are doing this week, I want to read from chapter 2 verse 17 again and then remind you of what we looked at last week.

- So please listen now as I read to you from 1 Thessalonians 2:17 to 3:5.
- This is the holy word of God and He calls for your attention—it is sacred and holy—it is from Him.

1 Thess 2:17 – 3:5: But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. ¹⁸ Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy. ^{3:1} Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, ² and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God,

and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, ³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴ For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 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 there we end the reading of God's infallible word.

In these words, we saw something very beautiful and very encouraging...

- We saw the passion that a faithful minister has for the people he ministers to!
- Paul had a deep yearning for them, a yearning that he would see them in the presence of Christ on the last day when Jesus returns to judge the world.
 - Jesus is going to come in all His glory with trumpet of God and with the holy angels, and every person,
 - both those who died and those who are yet alive will be brought before Him, and those have come to Jesus and been redeemed by Him and so have served Him to the end will be in His presence, but the rest will be cast out.
 - In that day all who have truly believed will actually be with the Son of God in all His beauty and glory and majesty and purity—as His bride now made spotless to live with Him in His Father's house forever and ever.

- How I wish I had words to describe to you how marvellous it will be!
- And you see here that Paul's yearning is to see the church at Thessalonica in the presence of Christ!
 - In verse 19, he said, **For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?**

We saw that Paul was deeply distressed because these Thessalonian believers had so warmly welcomed the gospel when they heard it...

- They had received it not as the word of men, but at the word of God that effectively worked in them...
 - They had left their idols in the face of terrible opposition from their families and their fellow Thessalonians...
 - It was a glorious reception of the gospel that thrilled Paul—just to think that he would see them in the presence of Christ...
- But as he was just beginning to give these new believers all that they would need to serve the Lord in the hostile environment that they were in...
 - he had been torn away from them—not in his heart, but in his bodily presence.
 - The word in verse 17 that is translated “taken away” is a word that refers to children being taken away from their parents—that is how Paul felt.
 - He was just laying the foundation for them and he had been torn away against his will.

He tells how he had tried again and again to come to them, but was hindered by Satan.

- In chapter 3, he says, both in verse 1 and in verse 5 that he could not bear to be apart from them—and so at last he decided to send his young co-worker, Timothy.
 - We do not know all the reasons that Paul could not go—we are only told that Satan hindered him—or blocked him...
 - I explained to you that Satan works very hard to keep Christian ministers apart from their people—he does not want you to receive the word.
 - He is relentless and does everything he can—both to ministers and to their people—sickness, misunderstanding, discouragement, drawing ministers into sin, drawing congregants into sin—anything to keep ministry from happening.

And Paul could not bear to have this separation continued.

- He could not bear to think of these dear Thessalonian believers, without a new testament (for it had not yet been written) and with only three weeks of instruction facing terrible persecution...
- He was concerned, as he says in verse three, that they might be shaken by all these afflictions—even that his labour among them in the gospel might be in vain—he says that in verse 5...
 - Even though they had professed faith, and that quite convincingly, Paul was concerned that some of them might not yet be truly established in Christ.
 - Many people make professions of faith and are rightly baptised, but they don't really come to know Christ in a true saving way until later...

- We looked at the parable of the sower and we saw how Jesus spoke of four kinds of soil—one that rejects the word and three that receive it—but only one of those three continues to the end.
 - The other two did not truly repent so that when persecution comes, one of them is turned away, while for the other, the word is choked out by the temptations of the world.
- This is something that many in the church today are not concerned about, but Paul certainly was—
 - He was yearning to see them all in the presence of Jesus Christ on the day of His coming!
 - He could not bear to think of them being cast into the abyss on that day!
 - And that in part because he had never been able to finish establishing them and encouraging them in the gospel!

And so he sent Timothy to carry on that great work...

- He states that this was his goal...from verse 2 he says that he...
 - **sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, ³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions;**

Last week, I told you that this week, I wanted to show you what this work of establishing and encouraging the church in the faith is.

- This work that Paul saw as essential if he was going to see these who had professed their faith in heaven.
- And I want you to understand that it is essential!
 - That is why our Lord provides this ministry for His saints.

Don't forget, Paul, as an apostle, is Christ's minister—he faithfully represents Him.

- The passion we see in him is a reflection of the passion of Jesus who sent him!
 - Most ministers are not as true to their Master as Paul was, but it is very encouraging for us to know that Jesus Christ will not let one of His elect people be deprived of what they need to reach glory!
 - The church is His bride—we all make up His bride that will be presented to Him on the last day—and Jesus tells us that not one of us will be lost!
 - Yes, there will be those who profess to believe that will be lost—many like that—but if you really are among those who have come to Jesus,
 - He will keep you!
 - His love is so strong that He, the very Son of God, left all the honour He had as the Son of God to come to this world as a man and to die on the cross to atone for our sins.
 - Such love is too high for us—we cannot grasp the length and the depth and breadth and the height of it!
 - But it is a love that absolutely will not let us go but will relentlessly pursue us until at last we are safe in glory!

What an encouragement it is to know that this is the Saviour who provided the ministry to the Thessalonians that they needed,

- and who will, if we are truly His, provide the ministry and everything else that we need to endure!

TRANS> So now let us look and see what that ministry entails.

- We will look at the two things that Paul speaks of here:

I. First, the Lord provides us with ministry that establishes us in our faith.

A. The word translated *establish* in verse 2 means to set something in place so that it will not move.

1. For example, it is used of Jesus *setting His face* to go to Jerusalem when the time came for Him to be crucified.
 - The time had come, and so He had firmly resolved to go and face the horrors of the cross from which every fibre of His being recoiled.
 - It was His set purpose upon which He was fixed.
2. The word also means *to strengthen* and is sometimes translated in that way.
 - For example, the root of this word is used in Acts 15:41 to refer to the ministry Paul and Silas had when they went through Syria and Cilicia *strengthening the churches*.
 - In fact, it is a standard practice of the apostle, mentioned several times in Acts to go to all the churches where the gospel had been planted to establish and strengthen them.
 - In Acts 14:22, we are told that Paul and Barnabas...
 - **returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”**
3. You can see how this ties in with what Timothy was doing at Thessalonica.
 - The apostolic team had not had time to establish the Thessalonians before they had been forced to depart—not even in a very rudimentary way...
 - so Paul had sent Timothy to make up for this deficiency.

TRANS> So what does our Lord do to establish His people in the faith?

B. First, He establishes His church for His people.

1. He sets them in this place and that place in churches.
 - a. Perhaps you will remember that in Matthew 16 when Peter confessed his faith in Christ, Jesus promised to build His church.
 - He said that the gates of hades would not prevail against it.
 - b. Paul encourages the Ephesians that they, who were once Gentiles, have now been established in the church...set firmly in place...
 - Eph 2:19-22 says: **Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole**

building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

- c. Our Lord has provided this society for us in this world of trouble and opposition so that we can stand.
 - It is said to be built on the apostles and prophets because they are the ones who were appointed by Him to set up the church.
 - In the scriptures, which they also gave us by the Holy Spirit, we have revealed to us the pattern of how churches are to be organised and what they are to do.
 - The New Testament does not know of disciples who are left outside of the organised church because Jesus appointed the church for His people.
 - That is why we cannot admit to the Lord's Table those who are not members of an organised church.
 - You are not following Christ, except in extraordinary cases, if you are not a member of a faithful church.
 - You should not consider relocating unless there is a faithful church for you to join.
2. All the way through the Bible, we see the establishment of churches as a priority.
 - a. I referred to Acts 14:22 before where we are told that Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen or establish the souls of the disciples they had just won to the faith...
 - And the next verse tells us that one of the first things they did was to establish churches, following the pattern given them by Jesus.
 - It tells us that they appointed elders in every church.
 - b. The church has an organisational structure that Christ has appointed for it.
 - It has elders just like the synagogues did,
 - to provide oversight to the people—to teach them, to receive those who believe, to remove those who apostatise, to provide all the nurture and care that the Lord has appointed.
 - When Paul wrote to Titus years later, he was still stressing the need to organise churches with suitable elders.
 - In Titus 1:4-7, he writes to Titus these words: **To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— ⁶ if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. ⁷ For a bishop must be blameless**—and he goes on to spell out more qualifications for them.
 - So a church is not just a random group of Christians at work or in the neighbourhood gathered for prayer and Bible study.
 - It is an organisation with a structure—with elders who are bishops or overseers who meet the qualifications Christ established.

- So many Christians in our day have become disillusioned with the organised church, and there is good reason for it...
 - the church has often failed them in some way...
 - but it is neither wise nor allowed for us to remove ourselves from what Christ has appointed.
 - It is our duty to find solid churches and to join them.
 - The command to the disciples of Jesus regarding the elders is this:
 - **Heb 13:17: Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.**
 - And not only does the church have an organisational structure given by the Lord through His apostles.
- c. It also has ordinances appointed by Him.
- 1) The ordinance that is most spoken of in the New Covenant is the preaching of the Word.
 - In the New Covenant, we no longer have ceremonies showing us how atonement for sin by death is required for the remission of sins.
 - Instead, we have the preaching of the gospel which is to be done by those who are called—who meet the criteria established in the word.
 - They are commanded to **2 Timothy 4:2: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**
 - 2) Alongside of preaching, there are the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper which also point to the work of Christ in His people.
 - These are church ordinances that are to be done in the church according to Christ's directives through the apostles, and administered by the minister under the oversight of the elders.
 - 3) Along with this, there are the prayers of the church—the ordinance of singing praise and of taking vows and entering into covenants.
 - There is the pronouncement of the blessing upon God's people that carries over into the New Testament, and the confessing of faith.
 - 4) Christ's command through His apostles related to the ordinances of the church is essentially this:
 - **Heb 10:26: do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some.**
3. You can see how important the church is for establishing believers permanently in the way of the Lord!
- a. For one thing, it gives them oversight and accountability—there are in the church those who watch for their souls.
 - In a solid church, no one should be able to slip into disobedience without being called to repentance.
 - Besides that, there is the mutual comfort and encouragement we need to go on in a hostile world—we will be talking about that more later.

- b. For another thing, the church provides structure for the ordinances the Lord has given us for our preservation and growth.
 - Last week, we saw how Satan tries to keep ministers and disciples apart from each other—
 - He tries to hinder them in any way he can.
 - Having an ordinance to meet on the Lord’s Day to carry out the ordinances goes a long way in keeping ministers and people together.
 - The church provides a structure where regular preaching can occur—among people you know and among people who give you oversight—
 - Not people on TV, but people who care about you and are there to shepherd you and keep you accountable.
 - c. No wonder the LORD makes it a priority—as we see through His apostle right here in our text—to establish disciples in churches.
- C. But there is a whole other way of establishing or strengthening disciples that is also essential,
- and that is *catechesis*.
1. Did you know that this is a very biblical term?
 - The verb in the original is *katee-cheo*.
 - It appears numerous times in the New Testament and is translated by different English words,
 - but the idea is “to impart information” or “to teach.”
 - It also appears in different forms.
 - To give you a couple of examples,
 - in Luke 1:3-4, Luke writes to Theophilus, telling him that he wants to give him an orderly account, he says, **that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed**.
 - The word *instructed* is *kata-kee-this* in the original...so Luke wrote his gospel so that that Theophilus might know the certainty of the things in which he had been *catechised*.
 - In a similar way, when Apollos comes on the scene in Acts 18, we are told in verse 25 that he had been instructed (catechised) in the Lord.
 - And then there is Galatians 6:6 where the word is used twice...it says: **Let him who is taught (catechised) the word share in all good things with him who teaches (catechises)**.
 2. So when Paul sent Timothy to establish the believers at Thessalonica so that they would not be shaken, that included catechising them!
 - They needed to be taught the basics of the faith.
 - Brothers and sisters, you have to know what you believe or you will be swallowed up by the world...
 - You have to be taught of Christ—that He is God manifest in the flesh—that He came into the world to save sinners.
 - That He died on the cross and rose again for our justification.

- You have to be taught His commandments,
 - for Jesus said that if we love Him we will keep His commandments—but how can you obey them if you do not know them?
- You have to be taught about the church and the ordinances that I was talking about a few minutes ago—how to use them properly—how to pray, how to hear the word, how to improve your baptism...
- You need to be taught about Satan and how to stand against him.
- You need to learn about the work of the Holy Spirit and about the new birth and about sanctification through His work in you.
- You need to be taught about God’s promises, and about the return of Christ.
- You can’t hold fast to the faith in a hostile world if you do not know the faith!
 - You are not established until you are catechised in the rudiments.
 - When enemies and false teachers come, you will not be able to defend what you believe and you will be led astray.
- Catechesis has been neglected in the modern church, and that means that we have many disciples who are not established in the faith.
 - Very often, children go out and they were never grounded in the faith, so they fall away as soon as they leave the home.

TRANS> Paul knew of the opposition that was being brought against the Thessalonian converts, and that is why he insisted that Timothy go to establish them in the faith...

- both by establishing them into a church and by catechising them in the rudiments of the Christian faith.
- Paul knew how important this was, but Jesus knows that even more...
 - He was the One who sent Paul and directed him to do these things.
 - He is the One who appointed the church and catechesis for His people.
 - He is the One who has appointed these for you today!
 - He is still reigning and He is still praying for His church and He is still sending His servants out to do this work.
 - How thankful we should be—how we ought to look to Him to establish us and those we love in the faith.
- But there is also this other word that is used here...Timothy was not only sent to *establish* them in their faith, but also to *encourage* them in their faith.

II. Consider now how our LORD provides encouragement for us in the faith.

A. The word translated *encourage* is a very comprehensive word.

1. We have run across it before—it is the word *par-ah-ka-leh’-o*
 - It is the word that literally means, “to call to one’s side.”
 - The idea is that you call them to your side to encourage them, to comfort them, to admonish them, to plead with them, to exhort them.
 - Very often, it especially has to do with the encouragement to keep going—where you encourage another not to give up in hard times.

2. That certainly seems to be the case in our 1 Thessalonians 3:2 because of what is added in verse 3 where we are told that...
 - Timothy was sent to: **encourage you concerning your faith, ³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions.**
 - Timothy was there not only to establish them, but also to encourage them to keep on going for Christ.
3. This too was standard practice in the ministry of the apostles...
 - Once again, if we look at Acts 14:22, we find this word is joined with the word *establish* just like it is here in 1 Thessalonians 2.
 - **Acts 14:22: strengthening** [our word establishing] **the souls of the disciples, exhorting** [our word encouraging] **them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”**

TRANS> This is what the apostles did because this is what the disciples of Christ need all along the way.

- The apostles would get the encouraging going, and set up elders, and then the members in the churches would be able to continue encouraging one another.
- B. One of the most important things that disciples of Jesus need to know is that He has appointed affliction for them!
1. That’s right—it is no accident.
 - It is intentional.
 - It is part of His design for their growth and discipleship.
 - Did you know that?
 2. Look at verse 3...
 - Paul says that encouragement is to be given **that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this!**
 - a. The word *appointed* means that it is something that afflictions are something that God has firmly put in place for us to endure.
 - They are set and though we might pray for them to be removed, we will very often find that they are firmly set in place.
 - Paul himself experienced this with his thorn in the flesh—he prayed, but it did not go away.
 - b. Jesus Himself told us that we would have much tribulation in this world.
 - Those ministers who tell you that by coming to Jesus your troubles will vanish are lying to you.
 - In verse 4, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had told them from the start that they would suffer tribulation if they followed Christ.
 - And now, he says, it has happened, just as we told you.
 - He was not making it up.
 - c. When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He tells us that we must take up our cross daily and follow Him.
 - That means that every day we must learn to die to self.
 - Taking up your cross means that you are to give yourself over to die.

- By nature, we are so selfish that we don't care about others.
 - We are so self-absorbed that we cannot esteem others more highly than ourselves the way Jesus does.
 - And even worse, we cannot love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as we ought—it is the greatest of all the commandments!
- We are so warped that we think God ought to honour us and do what we want...
 - But we are the creatures and He is the Creator!
 - We were made to serve Him and to do His will!
- d. And so He has appointed, as Paul says in Philippians, not only that we believe but also that we suffer for His sake.
 - Affliction is given to us to help us die to self so that we might then be raised again.
 - Satan afflicts us to destroy us—and so does Jesus...
 - But Satan does it to destroy us forever while Christ does it to destroy us so that He can raise us up again!
 - He Himself gives us the pattern—
 - Satan and God both willed that Jesus would die, and He did...
 - But Satan wanted His death to be the end while God wanted Him to die that He might raise Him up again with eternal life for all His people!
- e. Dear people of God, do not look at affliction as something that must move out of your way!
 - The word *appoint* in verse 3 where it says that “we were appointed for this” speaks of it being fixed in place for us—by God.
 - You can pray for the affliction to be removed, but if God has appointed it, embrace as what He has appointed for your good...
 - not for your ease, but for your good—that you might die so you can live.
 - Don't spend all your time fighting against the affliction—spend your time putting to death your sin by God's grace so that you can live for Him.

TRANS> So yes, the LORD has appointed affliction for us in this world...lots of it...

- C. But know that because He has appointed affliction, He has also appointed encouragement for us!
1. Listen to me—of all people, Jesus knows that affliction is hard—very hard to bear!
 - And He is a merciful Saviour who is full of compassion!
 - And that is why He sends His ministers to encourage His people!
 - He Himself wanted encouragement when He suffered, and He did not get it, but He has commanded encouragement to be given to His people.
 2. Paul is doing His will when he yearns to go to the Thessalonians that he might encourage them so that they will not be shaken by their afflictions.

- It is the Spirit of Christ in Paul that makes him yearn to go to them and encourage them.
 - Know that Christ calls you to encourage one another because of affliction and know that if you are His true servant, He will provide the encouragement that you need so that affliction will not destroy you, but rather give you new life!
3. What is the encouragement that He brings you?
- a. He sends you the encouragement of what I was just talking about...
 - The encouragement that He has appointed all of your afflictions so that you will die to self and live to God.
 - And not only that, but also so that you will be able to show your love to Him for all that He has done for you by serving Him patiently when you are afflicted...
 - And that by doing that, other believers will be encouraged, and unbelievers will be brought to repentance.
 - Very often, it is in days of persecution that many people see the reality of our faith and come to Christ.
 - b. He also sends you the encouragement of showing you that is worth it to suffer for Him...
 - When we suffer, His Spirit shows us more than ever how much Christ loves us—we come to see the breadth and length and depth and height of His love...
 - Suffering puts you in the perfect position to see the worthiness of God...
 - You are called to suffer for His sake—to bear whatever it is for Him...
 - And that forces you to look at how worthy He is and at what He has done for you...
 - And it is at that time that the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see it.
 - Not always right away—you falter and go back and forth—but over time, He opens your eyes you see His glory and love.
 - And you grow in your love for Him.
 - c. He also sends you the encouragement of a more sure hope of heaven when you suffer—and that in two ways.
 - 1) As you suffer for Him, you see the fruit of His saving work in you—that He has changed you so that you who would not follow Him are now willing to suffer for Him.
 - That gives you assurance that you truly do know Him.
 - 2) And secondly, your hope is strengthened because when you suffer, it causes you to yearn for heaven.
 - He tells you that your reward will be great in heaven for your suffering.
 - He tells you that the suffering you now endure is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is coming.

- And above all, you yearn to be with Him in His exaltation—in glory—to be in His presence and to serve Him without sin and without all the things that hinder you in this world.
- d. He encourages you about your past too...
- Not in the way that it is so often wrongly taught in the church today—that Christ sees you as a poor mistreated victim and comes to rescue you...
 - But rather that you come to see more and more that there was no injustice in the affliction that you suffered.
 - Certainly there was injustice on the part of those who abused you—but there was no injustice with God.
 - The encouragement is that your God is perfectly just and that you deserve far worse than you got in this life...
 - And you see that Christ saved you, not because you were a victim, but because you were a wretched sinner...
 - He bore the curse that you deserve, and all of your sufferings cannot begin to compare with that.
 - When you see how hard it is, even after you have been saved, for you to die to self and to live for God,
 - You realise just how sinful and warped you really are—and you are able to be at peace with all that you have ever had to suffer.
 - You are able to rejoice that by God’s grace, it has been used to purge you of self so that you might come to Christ.
- e. There is so much more encouragement we could talk about...
- The encouragement that when you suffer, you are enabled to comfort others with the comfort that God gives you...
 - The encouragement that God will always provide you with the grace that you need to bear whatever suffering He brings your way...
 - As He said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

Conclusion

How thankful you ought to be for your Saviour!

How He loves you!

- He has provided everything you need to endure to the end!
 - He establishes you and He encourages you—through His Word and through the ministry of the Word in the church.
- Receive it all from His gracious hand with a glad heart and you will be blessed.
 - He will see you through to the end.
 - Please join me in giving thanks.