

I THESSALONIANS 3:1-5
GODLY MEN/WORD OF GOD

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 3 as we continue to study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. We have seen so far, in I Thessalonians chapter 1 *how this church was born*. Paul tells us in I Thessalonians 1:5-7, "**For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.**"

Now doubt about it, the Spirit of God opened up the Word of God to these people's lives and they were radically changed. And though they were young in the Lord their faith was strong, it was bold, they were witnesses to others of what the Lord has done in their lives!

Then, in I Thessalonians chapter 2 we looked at *how this church grew*. Paul put it like this in I Thessalonians 2:13, "**For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.**"

The Word of God opened up to them by the Spirit of God not only brought them to saving faith but it helped them to mature in the faith, grow in the faith!

This morning, as we continue our study here in I Thessalonians, we are going to be looking at the next section of this letter and it deals with *how the church was established*. You see, like a child growing up, there are difficult things that come our way, that we must face and the same is true here with these young believers. And thus, these things that they faced were helping them to grow, to mature in the faith just as a young child grows and matures as they face the lessons of life!

And as we will see this morning, Paul is going to send Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how these brethren are doing and to encourage them in the faith. I find it amazing how the attitude of people can change you. Think about it. If someone is complaining about this and complaining about that, they are just complainers, what happens to you? You start to complain! You become like them many times! And folks, that is not necessarily good, it just depends on the example they are setting, the things that they are saying, the actions they are taking.

Let me share this story and you will see how we can influence people in a positive way or in a negative way. We are told,

I was aboard a large air liner some time ago which ran into an extremely severe wind and rainstorm. Despite the size of the plane and the tremendous power of its four wing motors, the ship was being tossed violently.

A little nine-year-old fellow was my seat companion. It was his first experience in the air, and he was desperately afraid. Suddenly he looked up at me and said, “Are you afraid?” I smiled and replied, “No, this is real fun.”

An immediate change came over the little chap – fear and tension left him. He, too, had fun.

- Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, 2835

Now you may be thinking, “Hey, wait a minute! The plane was still being tossed up and down and shaken in this storm. I should worry. I should be scared. I should be afraid. I’m going to die! I should . . .”

You are right, you are still in the storm. You are still being tossed. That has not changed. What has changed is your focus!

Now let’s play that out looking at this world today because some of you may be thinking, “Well, we can do that if we ignore all the evil, the wickedness, the immorality, the violence and the rest that is going on! But I am not going to do that!”

Please hear me out on this. I am not saying that we are to ignore these things, they are out there and the Bible does tell us that things are going to get worse. What I am saying is that we, as Christians, are not to let these things drive us, they are not to overwhelm us. And it is easy to let that happen!

I guess, like the little boy, we need someone to encourage us and tell us it is going to be okay! We need to get our focus on the Lord and His Word! I guess, what we truly need to do is what Paul said in Philippians 4:8-9, **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”**

In other words, get yourself focused back on the Lord, speak about what He is doing in your life, and you will not only find that peace within your own life instead of the anxiousness and anxiety the world is trying to give you, but you will also be encouraging others in the faith as well.

And we will see that in our study this morning how godly men who spoke forth the Word of God encouraged these young believers to continue on in the faith, not to give up, to be established in the faith!

So, with that as our background, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 3 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us this morning as we look at this topic of ***GODLY MEN/WORD OF GOD!***

I THESSALONIANS 3

VERSES 1-3

Paul opens up this chapter with the word, “**Therefore**” and is brings us back to what Paul just spoke of back in I Thessalonians chapter 2. Paul said, “**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. Therefore we wanted to come to you - even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan hindered us. 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? For you are our glory and joy.**”

Paul's desire was to go back to Thessalonica and see these new believers, to encourage them in the faith. But Paul says, “**Satan hindered us.**” He put up roadblocks, made the road impassable and the Lord did not intervene, it was not the Lord's plan for Paul to go back to Thessalonica.

But Paul had such a love for the brethren, that even if he could not go, that was not going to stop him from finding out how they were doing and to encourage them and thus, he sends Timothy to go back to Thessalonica and see what was going on, to help them.

If you remember from Acts chapter 17, Paul was waiting in Athens alone and then Timothy and Silas came to Him there, (Acts 17:14-15). And after a period of time Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, (Acts 18:5), and Silas went somewhere in Macedonia, perhaps Philippi and Paul was **“left in Athens alone.”**

This is speaking of leaving a loved one behind at death and that is how Paul felt. But he loved them so much that he was willing to suffer this loss of Timothy, in the sense of him departing from Paul, and going and minister to the people of Thessalonica.

And this was probably a low point in Paul’s life. All the persecution he faced for his faith in Christ and now, left in Athens we see that he gave his sermon there on Mar’s Hill to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, and that did not go too well. Then Paul moved on to Corinth, another wicked place!

That truly is ministry or living out the Christian life. It is not always easy but we need to keep in mind that the Lord is our Shepherd, He is the One who is guiding our lives and all He asks of us is to follow Him. That is what Paul was doing and even this man of God got down, he was discouraged. And when you take your eyes off of God and place them on the situations that are before you, it is easy to get down, it is easy to get discouraged!

After some time in Thessalonica, Timothy came back with the report of how they were doing and that is what Paul is expounding on here in this chapter. We see this spoken of in Acts 18:5 where we are told, **“When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.”** Paul was encouraged by the report he received regarding these Thessalonian believers.

Now, keep in mind that Satan may have put up roadblocks but Timothy got through to establish or strengthen them in the faith and to encourage them.

And this is important. First you have to be ***ESTABLISHED*** in the right things before you can be ***ENCOURAGED***, otherwise it is just a false encouragement.

Some of you may remember this story and the reason I am sharing it is to show you that you need correct information or it could be deadly! We are told,

March 26, 1997: Comet Hale-Bopp claims the lives of 39 cult members as it flies past Earth.

Police found the bodies of 39 members of a San Diego cult who had committed mass suicide in the hope that the passing Hale-Bopp comet would carry them into space.

On this day in 1997, US police discovered the bodies of 39 cult members who had committed mass suicide in an attempt to allow their souls to hitch a ride on a passing spaceship.

The dead were members of the Heaven’s Gate cult, and they had willingly taken their own lives in the belief that their souls would be whisked to the “next level” by aliens travelling in the wake of a passing comet.

They believed Comet Hale-Bopp . . . carried a spaceship in its luminous tail, and they chose to shed their earthly bodies - simply “containers” - as the comet passed close to Earth.

Death, they reasoned, would allow their souls to take flight and thumb an alien lift to a higher plane. Or, in the words of their leader Marshall Applewhite, to a “level of existence above human”.

They died in shifts at their rented pad in San Diego, with some members helping others take a lethal cocktail of phenobarbital, apple sauce and vodka before downing their own doses of the fatal mixture.

Police found the dead lying neatly in bunk beds with their faces and torsos covered by a square, purple cloth. Each body sported an armband reading ‘Heaven’s Gate Away Team’.

Investigators later noted that each member carried exactly \$5.75 in cash. This was said to be for an interplanetary toll.

Several of the cult’s members, including Applewhite, underwent voluntary castrations in the months leading up to the mass suicide.

Indeed, members were taught to denying themselves worldly comforts such as sex, physical affection and individuality.

The cult believed that world was due to be “wiped clean” or “recycled” by an impending apocalypse, and that being ‘clean’ in one’s own life was a prerequisite for elevation to a “transhuman” state.

Detective Rick Scully, one of the first police officers on the scene, would later compare his involvement to “being on an episode of the Twilight Zone”.

He said: “We were wandering from room to room to room, and every room we went into we were finding bodies.

“You’re thinking: ‘When is this going to end? How many bodies are going to be in here? How many rooms are there to this place?’ Every room we went in had bodies stacked up like cordwood.”

- <http://home.bt.com/news/on-this-day/march-26-1997-comet-hale-bopp-claims-the-lives-of-39-cult-members-as-it-flies-past-earth-11363970925759>

Do you see how that information was wrong and thus, it just cost them their lives! And many do that today. They believe what they want, even though it is not true, thinking it will help them. But it won’t. It may placate them for a time, but in the end, vanity, emptiness!

With Timothy going back to Thessalonica, what we see is this godly man went to encourage them in the faith with the Word of God! Why is that important? Because the Word of God is truth!

Notice what we are told once again in I Thessalonians 3:1-2, **“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 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.”**

Did you see that? Timothy was sent to these Thessalonian believers to ***ESTABLISH*** and ***ENCOURAGE*** them regarding their ***FAITH!*** How is that done?

First of all that word, **“establish”** means to strengthen or to steadfastly set, to turn resolutely or decisively in a certain direction or to establish permanently. Now what establishes us in the faith? It is simple, it is the Word of God!

As much as people today downplay the Word of God, they don’t see it as being important, and they will come up with all kinds of reasons why they feel this way, the early church met to study God’s Word! It was that important to them.

When you are facing persecution, where are you going to find comfort? The Word of God! When there are problems in your marriage, in your family, where are you going to turn? The Word of God! When an illness has struck you or a family member, where are you going to find the peace to endure? The Word of God! When you are trying to figure out what you are to do, if this is right or it is wrong, where are you going to look? The Word of God!

I can go on but the Word of God is our lifeline! Peter put it like this in II Peter 2:2-4, **“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”**

That power to live according to what God has established is found in the Word of God and we are empowered by the Spirit of God! You see, those **“precious promises”** are found in His Word and if we want to know how to live, if we want to know what to do, if we want His peace in our lives, we need to rest in Him and His Word.

I don't know who wrote this but it sums things up for us very nicely. This person wrote about the Bible, "This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity."

Amen to that! The problem comes when we have people, even Christians, that take things out of context to come up with their own conclusions. Thus, if it is not truth then error is not going to establish you in the faith but take you away from the faith.

And we see that so much today. We have things like, "Christian Yoga" and that is not even close to the truth. There is no such thing. The word means, "yoked to" and it is speaking of being yoked to these Hindu gods! And that is just one example. We can look at how psychology has flooded into the church. Worldly ideas on growing a church. All kinds of false teaching allowed into the church because a few Scriptures have been added to make it look like it is Biblical. Let me show you what I mean.

There is a sign coming up in the heavens in September of this year, 2017. And like many of the other predictions of the Lord's return, this one is also far off base as you will see. Let me share with you what one web site had to say and please understand that this is a hot topic. It reminds me a lot of what happened with the 88 reasons why the Lord was going to return, the Rapture would occur, in 1988 and then when that didn't happen, another book and another prediction, 89 reasons why the Lord would return or the Rapture was going to take place in 1989! Again, that did not happen and there were no more books by this prophet!

Listen to what this article has to say and then we will look at what the Scripture has to say. And the writer, as you will see, will use Scripture but again, taken out of context! This is what he wrote and it seems like a Christian web site,

If you read my earlier post on the Revelation 12 sign you understand that the astronomical alignment which occurs for the first and only time in all of history will take place in September of 2017. For the following to be understood one must hold to the belief that there are no accidents in God's sovereign order. That He created the heavens for His glory, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1).

When God created the stars He let us know the reason. *"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years"* (Genesis 1:14). First, to divide day from night or light from darkness, which has another layer to its meaning as well. Secondly, for signs and for seasons. "Signs" is precisely what John saw in Revelation 12 and seasons do not refer to winter, spring, summer and fall but rather recurring periods of time.

The planetary bodies involved are as follows: Regulus, Venus, Mars, Mercury, Sun, Spica, Jupiter, and the Moon. Any study of astronomy will tell you the uniqueness of this event. Study of John's vision in Revelation 12 will tell you he was speaking of a specific alignment of stars in the heavens. . . .

The names of each star and their patterns of movement are by design NOT by coincidence. It is with this premise we will uncover the remarkable statement God is making with this specific sign which He draws our attention to in Revelation 12. In this event Virgo, the Virgin is giving birth to Jupiter (the King Planet) while holding an ear of wheat in her hand. The alpha star of the constellation Leo, or Lion of Judah, Regulus is first to rise on the horizon followed by Venus (the morningstar). This sign is loaded with symbolic and literal meaning and this is what I hope to unravel for you in the following paragraphs. . . .

Taking the meaning of each star and planet covered above through all cultures for: Regulus, Venus, Mars, Mercury, Sun, Spica, Jupiter, and the moon the message is clear.

When we put it together we have this:

The King, The Lion of Judah, The Morningstar of Love, The Coming War, The Written Word, The One Who Breathed Life Into Being and Light Into Darkness, Is Gathering the Wheat, The King Is Arriving As Lightning With Grace For His Virgin.

- <http://www.dailycrow.com/what-is-the-revelation-12-sign-of-september-2017-saying/>

It may sound good. He may sound right, he does use Scripture, but when you compare what he is saying to the Scriptures, what you thought was true ends up being false. Let me show you what I mean.

In Revelation 12:1-6 we are told, **“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”**

This is one of the Scriptures he uses to prove his signs in the heavens, but is that what is being spoken of here in Revelation chapter 12? Not at all!

First of all, we see that John speaks of a **“great sign”** appearing in heaven or MEGA SEMEION in the Greek. And here the reference is towards God’s plans being set in motion and this is illustrated for us by this woman clothed with the sun, the moon and a garland of twelve stars on her head. Now, to have a correct understanding of what God’s plans are, you have to understand who this woman is.

The Roman Catholic Church claims this is the Virgin Mary, also known as the “Queen of Heaven.” Do a search in the Scriptures and see what God has to say about the Queen of Heaven, and it is not good. You will even see this in their artwork with Mary standing upon a crescent moon and she has twelve stars around her head. But, as we will see, this woman is not the Virgin Mary.

Nor is it speaking literally of the heavens as we saw on that web site, it is used figuratively.

Then how do we know what this means? According to Biblical Hermeneutics, which is interpreting the Bible according to the grammatical-historical method, when God uses a symbol to speak forth a truth, the first time it is used in the Scriptures, (the law of first mention), that sets the standard for how it is used throughout the Scriptures. Thus, to understand who this woman is, we have to go back to the book of Genesis.

Remember the story of Jacob and his son Joseph who had two dreams in Genesis chapter 37. In his first dream, he dreamed they were binding sheaves in the field and his sheaf stood tall and the others bowed before this one.

In other words, the brothers of Joseph would bow before him. Then Joseph had another dream and in Genesis 37:9 and we are told, **“Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.’”**

Who is Joseph speaking of? Folks, we don’t have to guess because in Genesis 37:10-11 we are told, **“So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?’ And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”** The best commentary on the Bible is the *BIBLE!* So, Jacob tells us that the sun and moon represented him and his wife and the eleven stars represented Joseph’s brothers, Joseph being the twelfth.

How does that apply to what we have read here in Revelation chapter 12 so far? Let me ask you this? What came from Jacob and his 12 sons? I will give you a hint; God changed his name to Israel! You see, out of Jacob and his sons the nation of Israel was born and thus, this woman here in Revelation chapter 12 is speaking of the nation of Israel!

Now, as you look at the nation of Israel, their history, the persecution they have endured since their birth, you can understand why this woman is traveling in pain.

In fact, this child who was to be born is none other than Jesus Christ, the Messiah and the time frame of his birth was when Israel was under Roman authority, Roman occupation, Roman oppression!

And as you look at Jesus, His genealogy, you will clearly see He was born from the nation of Israel, specifically from the tribe of Judah! (See Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-38)

Also, keep in mind that signs are put in place to point us to something. First of all we are pointed to Jesus from the tribe of Judah and from the nation of Israel!

And here we see another sign, a **“fiery red dragon”** that opposes the plan of God, is in rebellion against God.

I believe it is very obvious who this dragon is, it is the Devil. But if you have any doubt, look at Revelation 12:9 because I think this clears it up. We are told, **“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”** This dragon, this slanderer, this adversary, seeks to kill, to destroy people’s lives with his lies. In fact, that is his natural language, lies! And we are told that this is the Devil, it is Satan himself!

I am not going to cover all that is in these verses but what I want to focus on is the last part of verse 4, which speaks of this dragon preparing to destroy this Child when He is born.

Do we see that played out in history? You bet we do! Herod was a paranoid little King even murdering his own sons because he thought they were trying to take over his title as King.

And thus, when the wise men came to Jerusalem looking for the King of the Jews, he wanted that child dead! In Matthew 2:16 we see his evil plan, **“Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.”**

But before he could kill the baby Jesus, Joseph, his stepfather, was warned by God in a dream and told to flee to Egypt until Herod was dead, and that is exactly what they did!

Now, I thought it was Satan who was trying to destroy Jesus? He is and he will use human instruments many times to carry out his evil deeds and man is more than willing to obey, thinking they are the ones in control, but they are just having their strings pulled. Don't fall prey to his evil plans, obey the Lord!

We are also told that this child was caught up to heaven and we see that with Jesus. God became flesh, dwelt among us and went to the cross of Calvary to pay in full the penalty for our sins. He was crucified and rose from the grave on the third day and then, we see that He was taken to God.

But the problem here is that Jesus never ruled the nations like verse 5 speaks of, how come? He will, when He comes again!

And if you truly want to see signs in the heavens, Jesus speaks of them in Matthew 24:29-30 and the focus is at the end of the Tribulation Period when He returns. We are told, **“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”**

And when you see God’s judgment being poured out in the book of Revelation, those signs in the heavens will not be missed! We need to be careful as we read books and hear teachers teach. Compare what they are saying to the Scriptures and if it does not add up, don’t buy it!

Remember those “blood moons” that were to usher in this and that, the coming of the Lord. What happened? A lot of books were written, Facebook posts were sent out, seminars taught on this and those days came and went and the Lord did not return. Again, look to the Scriptures to be your authority and not man!

Now how does this relate to these Thessalonian believers, this false teaching that we see today? It was happening back then. You see, listen to I Thessalonians 3:3 once again and you will see the struggles they had and then I will expound on what false teaching had come upon them because of it. We are told, **“that no one should be shaken by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.”**

What we see here is that persecution of these believers was so intense that they thought God was not happy with them or maybe even God abandoned them! In fact, we see that Paul has to correct this problem of them thinking they were in the Tribulation Period, that they missed the Rapture in II Thessalonians 2:1-2, where Paul said, **“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.”**

And what we see here is that Paul sends Timothy to remind them that the persecution they were facing was a normal part of the Christian life, don't be shaken by these things. Don't listen to what others are saying, even if they say it is a Word from the Lord! If it does not hold to the light of God's Word, then it is not of God!

Even a false letter was sent and signed as if Paul sent it to them. We see that so much today as people claim that God spoke to them, they are prophets or apostles, that God is doing things that go contrary to His Word and folks, that is not true. Never has been and never will be.

You see, if God did go contrary to His Word we could never trust Him and if God holds His Word above His name, and He does, then if we could not trust His Word then we could never trust Him! But we can. His Word is truth and we can trust what He has told us!

Now we will talk a little bit about why God allows trials in the lives of His children and keep in mind that those same trials that God is using in our lives the Devil is tempting us to sin! But we will look at that in a few minutes.

So, Paul sent Timothy to ***ESTABLISH*** them or ***STRENGTHEN*** them in the faith and to ***ENCOURAGE*** them in the faith. And that is what we see here. A godly man, Timothy, encouraging them with the Word of God to continue on in the faith, don't give up!

And think about this. When you are going through tough times it is great to have someone by your side to encourage you, to keep you focused. And yes, the Word of God does that as the Spirit of God speaks to our hearts. But we also see God use brothers and sisters in the Lord to encourage us!

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

For years William Wilberforce pushed Britain's Parliament to abolish slavery. Discouraged, he was about to give up. His elderly friend, John Wesley, heard of it and from his deathbed called for pen and paper.

With trembling hand, Wesley wrote: "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God?"

"Oh be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it."

Wesley died six days later. But Wilberforce fought for forty-five more years and in 1833, three days before his own death, saw slavery abolished in Britain.

Even the greatest ones need encouragement.

- Carol Porter, (from 1001 Quotes, Illustrations, and Humorous Stories for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers)

So, Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to **ESTABLISH** them and **ENCOURAGE** them in the faith! Let's read on and look at what was troubling them, we have touched on it already. And we are going to start in verse 3.

VERSES 3- 4

Look at what Paul was concerned about regarding these new believers. He was concerned about their stability. Why? Because afflictions, hard times had come upon these believers and Paul was concerned that these things would “**shaken**” their faith.

The Greek word for “**shaken**” is SAINO (sah’-ee-no) and the idea here is that of a dog wagging his tail. What does that mean?

Simply, the Devil is going to come along and try to flatter you with a promise of ease if you listen to him and move off the course that God has set for you. That is why we need to be established in the truth, the Word of God, so that we will not be shaken, but we will be encouraged in the faith! That is why we need to have brothers and sisters at our side to help us stay established in the truth so that we will not be shaken, but we will be encouraged in the faith!

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 4:16-18, “**Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**” Perspective is everything!

They were warned that these difficult times would come upon their lives and when it happened, it was tough. And please understand that Paul is not just talking about outward persecution here. He is also speaking of physical problems! Health issues of the person or family members and that too can be overwhelming!

Why would God even allow these things in our lives? I think A. W. Tozer hit the nail on the head when he said, “Before God can use a person greatly, he must allow that person to be hurt deeply.”

God is not being mean to us; it is just that we can’t comfort others with the comfort of God unless we have been comforted by Him ourselves! And there are other reasons why God allows these things in our lives. And I think it is good to be aware of them so we don’t lose hope, we don’t get discouraged, we don’t drop out!

Here are several reasons why God allows tribulation in our lives, persecution.

A. It shows that our faith is real as Peter tells us in I Peter 1:6-7, **“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** You see, it not only proves the reality of our faith, but it also weeds out those who are mere professors of the faith and not possessors!

B. We can bring the comfort and encouragement of God to others as I have said. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 1:3-4, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”** We can come and help those who are going through trials and encourage them!

C. It helps us to develop endurance, perseverance as Paul tells us in Romans 5:3, **“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.”** We see here that we grow through those tough times because we have to trust in the Lord and we forge ahead in the work no matter what!

D. It gives us boldness as we are told in Acts 4:29, **“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word.”** And in Acts 8:2-3 we are told, **“And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.”** I like that. It gives us a boldness or helps us to be more zealous in spreading the Gospel!

E. And it helps remove impurities from our lives as Job 23:10 tells us, **“But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”**

Now, like I have said, persecution, difficulties in our lives will strengthen or temper our faith, the faith of genuine believers. It is just like fire does to steel, it tempers it. But, for phony faith of false Christians, just like fire does to paper or wood, they will be burned up. Their faith was not real! And that leads us into verse 5 as Paul said . . .

VERSE 5

Now we need to remember that Paul had very little success in Athens as he spoke to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. In Acts 17:32-34 we are told of what transpired as Paul shared Christ with them, **“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”**

Just a handful of people received what Paul was saying and that was not too encouraging.

Then in Corinth, the armpit of the world you might say, totally wicked, Paul was depressed, he was down.

And now for these believers, he was deeply concerned. One writer put it like this, “Paul’s subdued missionary activities at Corinth before the return of Silas and Timothy (Acts 18:5) seems to indicate that Paul was deeply depressed because of the heavy burden of suspense and uncertainty concerning the outcome of his mission at Thessalonica.” (Hiebert)

Thus, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to make sure they were okay, to build them up in the faith. Folks, I don’t care how godly you think you are, when you are suffering affliction you need other godly people to come alongside and encourage you. That is why when we are going through tough times the enemy gets us to isolate ourselves.

Don't fall prey to his schemes, remain in the Body of Christ as Paul admonishes us in Hebrews 10:24-25, **“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

Now to end here and not know what happened, would be wrong. You see, in verse 6 we see what transpired, what happened to these believers. The testing of their faith, was it real faith or fake faith?

Listen to what Paul wrote, **“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. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.”** I Thessalonians 3:6-8.

I like that. Their faith was real but don't get comfortable in it. Stay focused and continue to stand fast in the Lord! I will close with this story because it shows what can happen as we get lazy in our walk and what others can do to help us get back on track. We are told,

For many years Monterey, a California coast town, was a pelican's paradise. As the fishermen cleaned their fish, they flung the offal to the pelicans. The birds grew fat, lazy, and contented.

Eventually, however the offal [the entrails and internal organs of an animal used as food.] was utilized, and there were no longer snacks for the pelicans.

When the change came the pelicans made no effort to fish for themselves. They waited around and grew gaunt and thin. Many starved to death. They had forgotten how to fish for themselves.

The problem was solved by importing new pelicans from the south, birds accustomed to foraging for themselves. They were placed among their starving cousins, and the newcomers immediately started catching fish. Before long, the hungry pelicans followed suit, and the famine was ended.

- Bits & Pieces, June 23, 1994, p. 17

How true that is for us as Christians. We can go through life and we can get lazy in our walk. And when difficulty comes, we don't know what to do. And praise God for His Word and other Christians who can share with us, who can **ESTABLISH** and **ENCOURAGE** us in the faith! What a wonderful God we have who loves us so much that He will not leave us where we are at but help us to grow in Him! **GODLY MEN AND THE WORD OF GOD!**