

1 Thessalonians 3

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Tape # 8186
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Okay, let's turn to 1 Thessalonians, chapter three.

Paul had to leave Thessalonica in a hurry. There was a warrant out for his arrest. So the people there for Paul's own safety, were urging him to leave. By the time they got to the house where Paul had been staying, Paul had already left. So they arrested Justus, a man of Thessalonica. They took him down to the magistrates. He had to post bail, but Paul was safely out of the city. But he had not been able to minister for any length of time. His ministry there lasted only a few weeks at the best. Paul was used to staying longer in an area, because not only did he want to bring them the gospel, but he wanted to get them established in the faith. And he had not had that opportunity there in Thessalonica. He was there a shorter time than in any of the other places where he had established a church. And so he was naturally quite concerned how these new little babes in Christ were fairing. He had gone from Thessalonica to Berea. There he was able to minister a little longer before trouble arose. He left Berea and went on to Athens. But while he was in Athens, he was so concerned for the church in Thessalonica that he told Timothy to go back to Thessalonica.

So in chapter three, Paul said, *Wherefore when we could no longer forbear (or stand it), we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;* ²*And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:* I would imagine that if some stranger came to town, and was preaching and teaching a new gospel that Paul was, declaring to them that according to the Scriptures, the Messiah, that the Jews were looking for, had to suffer and die and rise again from the dead. And that Jesus was the Messiah.

But basically he was in the synagogue, pointing to the Jews the facts from the Old Testament that spoke of the Messiah's suffering, His death and His resurrection. And many believed, but it did create a division. Many didn't believe and they stirred up trouble.

But to have then this man who had been there, who established from the Scriptures, the truth concerning the Messiah's suffering, death and resurrection, suddenly he is gone! And it probably left a lot of them wondering about Paul, about his ministry.

And thus, Timothy was commissioned by Paul to go back. Paul was to remain in Athens alone. We do remember from the Book of Acts that Paul was just sort of supposed to be kicking back a bit. It had been very strenuous, their ministry in Macedonia. It started out in Philippi, where he was beaten and arrested and thrown into the dungeon, into the stocks. Then to Thessalonica where the warrant was put out for his arrest and he had to escape. Then to Berea where again the Jews came from Thessalonica, stirred up problems, and Paul was forced to leave Berea. Now in Athens, he decided to stay there alone. He would send Timothy back to encourage them in the faith.

There in Athens, a city that was given over wholly to idolatry. Paul was just sort of to relax and rest, until Timothy and Silas would join him again. But while he was there in Athens, we remember that he was so moved by the idolatry that he started going up to Mars Hill, where the philosophers would gather and just present ideas and concepts. Listening to them and beginning to share with them concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he was invited to speak there on Mars Hill. You remember that tremendous message of Paul on Mars Hill. In a few weeks we will be standing on Mars Hill and we will be rehearsing for those that are there, the message of Paul there on Mars Hill.

But Timothy came back for the purpose of comforting them concerning their faith. Assuring them again of the Scriptures.

³*That no man should be moved by these afflictions:* He said he did not desire that anyone should be moved by these afflictions. That is, moved from their faith or their steadfastness in their faith in Jesus Christ because of the afflictions.

For he said, *for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.* ⁴*For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation;* (And just as we told you), *even as it came to pass, and ye*

know. When Paul was converted, he had been violently opposed to the Christian faith. He was determined, if necessary, to single handedly wipe out what they called this new sect, people who were acclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah. He wrecked havoc in the church and of the church in Jerusalem. He was one of the leaders of the persecution. Later it bothered Paul that he had been so vehement against the church. He has actually forced people to blaspheme Jesus.

He said he was less than the least of all of the apostles because he had persecuted the church. But on the road to Damascus, and the purpose of going to Damascus, was a continued persecution of the church. He had letters of authority from the high priest in Jerusalem, to arrest the Jews in Damascus, who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He was to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial.

But while he was on his way, just as he was there in the area of Mt. Hermon, almost to Damascus, suddenly around noon, there was light that was brighter than the sun that began to shine upon him. Paul fell on his face. There was a voice that came to him, saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It's been hard for you to kick against the goads.

Paul's persecution was a lot because of his being troubled about Jesus as the Messiah. And he was fighting hard against Jesus. But there was an inner turmoil going on. He was kicking against the goads. We do read that he was there attending the death of Stephen, when Stephen was stoned. He no doubt, heard the message of Stephen. And Paul was a scholar. Stephen's logic was something that you couldn't just dismiss.

In Stephen's sermon that Paul sat there and heard, Stephen pointed out how that their father, Joseph, was betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave to traders that were going to Egypt. And how that later on, his brothers had to bow before him, recognizing him as the ruler when they had gone down to Egypt to purchase grain. Stephen was pointing out that at first Joseph was rejected by his brothers, but later the one that was rejected was recognized as their Lord, as they did obeisance to him.

Then he spoke about Moses, how that when Moses first more or less presented himself as the deliverer of Israel, that he was rejected by them. They said to him, who made you to be a ruler over us? And how he fled and spent forty years out in the wilderness. It said, that he, Moses, thought that they would realize that God had purposed that he should deliver them. But they didn't! And he was driven out. But when he came back, he became the recognized leader whom God used to lead them out of their bondage.

He's drawing interesting parallels. Which of the prophets did not your fathers kill? In other words, the Jews had always been blind to the purposes of God. Their fathers rejected Joseph as their leader but yet he became the honored and respected leader. They had rejected Moses the first time. But the second time, he was received. So, he is drawing a parallel. Jesus was rejected the first time. But the second time, He will be received!

This no doubt, was something that Paul couldn't get away from. And he in his heavy persecution of the church was actually kicking against goads in his own mind, in his own heart, for surely the Holy Spirit was dealing with him.

It is interesting that so often when a person is under deep conviction, they are fighting the hardest against the things that they are being drawn to. And sometimes, you have your friends. They become almost intolerably opposed. You think, oooh, they are so far! No, they are so close. And they are fighting it. It's because they are about ready to capitulate.

I don't know about yours, but our kids, I tell you, they didn't like going to sleep. When they would start getting really sleepy, oh, how they would fight it. They would do everything to keep from going to sleep. And they would get just mean and cantankerous, because they were fighting sleep. They would realize they were drifting off and they didn't want to!

So it is when a person often is under deep conviction. They begin to really fight it. Paul was kicking against the goads.

When Paul then was brought into Damascus, he had to be led because the bright light had blinded him. He could not see. They led him into Damascus. And there he went to a house of a man by the name of Judas, who lived on the street called Straight, which is the main boulevard through Damascus to the present day. Now there was disciple in Damascus whose name was Ananias. And the Lord spoke to Ananias and said, Ananias go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for Saul, because he is

praying. Ananias said, Lord, I know about Saul. He came here to arrest those that are calling on Your name! He has wrecked havoc in the church in Jerusalem. And I'm on his hit list!

The Lord said, he is a chosen vessel unto Me. I will show him the things that he must suffer for My sake. It's interesting, the Lord didn't call Paul with a false kind of an invitation to a life of luxury and fame and glory. But He told Paul the things that he was going to suffer for the sake of the Lord. Paul makes mention of this, the tribulation that came. I'm appointed to that. I mean that's just my lot in the ministry. My lot is to just stir up people to cause them to want to kill me! That's just my lot, you know. And he said, when I was there, I told you, you know, that I'm appointed to tribulation. And just like I told you, it came to pass. And so indeed it did.

But I don't want you to be moved from your faith by the afflictions that I suffered.

⁵*For this cause* (Paul said, when I couldn't stand it any longer), *when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith*, His tremendous concern was their faith. Are they continuing in their faith? Notice back in verse two, he sent Timothy to comfort them, concerning their faith. And now, I sent that I might know your faith.

lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. I wanted to know how you were doing. I wanted to know if you were continuing in the faith. I know I wasn't there long enough to really establish you. And I know Satan's wiles.

You know, Jesus said, that the seed falls on various types of soil. And some fell by the wayside and that the birds came and they ate the seed. So Jesus in the explanation of the parable, said that that is the seed that falls on the wayside. Before it has a chance to even root, Satan comes and plucks it up.

So Paul is concerned lest Satan has come and taken advantage of the fact that they weren't able to really be established in the faith and drawn them away, to cause them to forsake the faith in Jesus Christ. So I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

⁶*But now when Timotheus came from you unto us*, Paul had gone from Athens on down to Corinth. Paul had begun to minister in Corinth. Again trouble began to sort of arise, but Corinth was such a horribly wicked city that they could tolerate Paul. So he didn't have as much trouble in Corinth as he did other places. He stayed quite a while in Corinth. But the interesting thing of Paul's ministry in Corinth is that he sort of hung out low until Timothy and Silas came, then he began to boldly preach to them, concerning Jesus Christ. He probably was just attending synagogue, meeting the people and just, you know, being pleasant and all until Timothy and Silas came, then he began to boldly preach. But then the Lord spoke to Paul. And the Lord told him, speak boldly here in Corinth for I have many people in this city. And the Lord said they will not harm you here. You are not going to end in a riot here. And so the ministry in Corinth was a longer ministry and encouraged by the Lord.

So when Timothy came, from you unto us, that is in Corinth, *and brought us good tidings of your faith* He brought us the good news about your faith. Again, faith is the thing that Paul is concerned with. Are they continuing to walk in the faith?

So he brought us the good tidings or the good news of your faith *and charity*, and of your love. And of course two of the Christian virtues are their faith, their love.

and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: He found out they really have a love for Paul. Oh how they desired to see Paul. And Paul said that is mutual. I desired to see you! But Paul was greatly encouraged when Timothy came with the good news of the believers there in Thessalonica.

He said, ⁷*Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:* We went through a lot of afflictions. While I was in Athens, I was very distressed. I came to Corinth. I was still very concerned, very distressed. But Timothy came, he brought the good news that you are going on in the faith, that you have great love. You have a love for us. You have a desire to see us, thus greatly comforted in the affliction and distress, because of our faith.

⁸*For now we live* (I can live!), *if ye stand fast in the Lord.* I mean, I can handle things if you're standing fast in the Lord, yes! That gives me the strength, I can live! I can live with the persecution. I can live with

all of the problems and all, as long as you are going on in the Lord.

⁹*For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; Oh, what can I say? What can I say to God? How can I express my thanks to God for the joy that you have brought to me, the joy of your faith? The joy that you are standing fast in the Lord and the joy that we have over you, our brothers!*

¹⁰*Night and day (Paul said) praying exceedingly (We've been praying fervently, exceedingly, earnestly.) that we might see your face,* His desire was to go back to Thessalonica.

Paul was never one to really forsake a place, just because of persecution. You remember in the Book of Acts when he had gone to Lystra, he was there stoned. They thought he was dead. They drug him out of the city, thinking that he was dead. And when his friends were standing around weeping, suddenly Paul began to stir. He stood up and what did he do? He said let's go back into town.

Now in the second missionary journey, Paul came back to Lystra. He came back to Derbe, the cities where he had been so mistreated. He came back to strengthen the churches that were there, that had been founded there. And of course, in coming back, he picked up Timothy, who began to journey with Paul and became a part of the missionary party with Silas. And Timothy joined with them, in his second trip through Derbe, there, and Lystra.

So we have been praying, night and day.

Again in almost every church that Paul writes to, he tells them how that he prays for them without ceasing. Paul was a man of prayer. Prayer was his life. And though he could not be there in person, he was there in Spirit as he was praying for them.

That is one of the beautiful things about prayer, is that it is not restricted by time, space or material obstacles. You can go into your closet and you can shut the door. You can spend fifteen or twenty minutes in China. You can journey with our missionaries there, with Al as he is taking the Scriptures and material into the believers in China. You can help him get past those border guards as they check his baggage and his luggage. You can help blind their eyes to all of the Bibles that he is carrying in. You can be with him in his exciting ventures into China to help the house church, there, through prayer. You can join with Al's ministry.

And then, if you desire, you can head over to Russia for a while. And you can spend time in the many Calvary Chapels that have been opened in Russia. You can spend time with George and his family there in Kiev.

Then, if you want, you can head up to Moscow. You can join there with the three Calvary Chapels that we have there in Moscow.

Then you can just go on up to St. Petersburg and join there.

Then you can head over to Poland and be with the missionaries there, then on down to Bulgaria and Romania.

You can travel the world in your closet, doing a work for God, through prayer! And that was Paul's life. Though he was in Corinth, he was praying without ceasing, night and day. He was earnestly praying for those in Thessalonica, but for those that were in Derbe, for those in Lystra, for those in Berea and Philippi and all. And as he writes to them, he speaks to them about how that he was praying without ceasing for them, even praying for places he had not yet been, as he wrote to the church in Rome and said how that he was praying without ceasing for them. He was a man of prayer! No wonder, he was able to accomplish so much for the kingdom of God!

You know a wonderful thing about prayer is that you may not be able to get around very much. It's something that you can engage in when every other opportunity of service might be closed out to you. It may be that physically, you're not even able to get out, but you can pray! And what a glorious thing it is to pray for the church, for the ministry. Paul was a man of prayer. Night and day, he was earnestly praying to see their face.

and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? And then the purpose of his wanting to see them was not that we could just have a party, you know. Sister Jones bakes such great cherry pies and that kind of stuff.

But I desire to be there that I might perfect that which is lacking in your faith. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Paul wasn't able to be there long enough to thoroughly establish them in the Scriptures. He was there just a short time when the persecution drove him out of the city. Thus, he wanted to come back and really teach them in order to establish them in the faith. I want to see your face again. I want to come back and perfect that or complete that which is lacking in your faith.

¹¹*Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.* This is his prayer. Oh, God, oh Jesus, direct our paths back to them. Give us the opportunity to come back to them.

¹²*And the Lord make you (and this is his prayer) to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:* May God just really work in your life and may you abound in love toward all men and toward each other. Surely this is the true mark of Christianity. Jesus said, by this sign shall men know that you are My disciples that you love another. And love was one of Paul's themes. Grace was one of Paul's themes. Love was one of Paul's themes and hope was one of Paul's themes, that he ministered. He ministered love and grace and hope to the people.

¹³*To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God,* This is the ultimate purpose, that your heart may be established unblameable in holiness.

I think that probably one of the greatest weaknesses in the church today is the lack of holiness. It is something that you rarely hear, sermons preached on holiness, anymore. We go back to the writings of the Puritans and the theme of the Puritans was that of holy living. But somehow, sadly, that theme has been lost.

Today you go and you hear much about self-esteem and how to communicate properly with your wife and how you should discipline your children and all kinds of themes on interpersonal relationship, but not much preaching on holiness. Yet that is a requirement of God. Be ye holy, God said, for I am holy. (Lev.20:7, 1 Peter 1:15)

There is too much compromise with the world. The Scripture tells us to love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. He that has the love of the world in his heart, has not the love of His Father. And there is such a compromise with the world and the things of the world in the church today.

In fact, the church in many places has brought the world into the church, under the guise of attracting people--the user-friendly church, the unchurchy church. You can go and not even know that you are in church. They don't want to scare people off.

A popular pastor, recently from his pulpit said, you'll never hear the word "sin" mentioned from this pulpit. He was sort of bragging about that. That's a tragedy and that's a travesty!

Paul is praying for them that they might be established in their hearts, unblameable in holiness before God. God make you pure! God make you holy--A holy people!

Holiness before God *even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.* Jesus Christ is coming again. Unto them that look for Him, shall He appear, the second time apart from sin. It is interesting how that Paul in his preaching, being there such a short time, a major part of his teaching was concerning the return of Jesus Christ and His establishing of the kingdom of God. The imminence of the return—Jesus is coming back soon, at any time! It is also interesting that at the close of each of the chapters. He closes them with a little mention of the return of Jesus Christ.

Chapter one, "To wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." This is a reference to the coming again of Jesus. You turn from the idols to serve the living God and to wait for the Son. You are waiting for Jesus to come from heaven.

And then at the end of chapter two, again he says, "For what is our hope and joy or crown of rejoicing? Our not ye even in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" When the Lord comes, the fact that you will be there and we will be together at the coming of the Lord, that's our joy! That will be the crown for our ministry. That will be the crowning moment of our ministry. It's being together with you when the Lord comes.

And here in chapter three again, at the end of the chapter, he again makes mention, "May God establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all of His saints." In other words, he wants them to be ready for the Lord, when He comes! Ready by walking in holiness,

walking in purity.

We don't know when Jesus is coming, but we know that it will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. When the trump of God sounds, the trump that announces the gathering together of God's people unto Him, you won't have time to get on your knees and say, oh God, I'm sorry! Oh, Lord, please! It will over in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye. And that to me is one of the greatest incentives there is for purity in our Christian walk—remaining and keeping pure.

Jesus gave a parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). Five were wise and five were foolish. When they were not expecting, the cry went out, behold the bride groom cometh. And it said, they that were ready, went in.

Paul is praying that they will be ready when the Lord comes with all of His saints.

Now as we get into the next chapter, Paul is going to devote a great portion of the next chapter to the rapture of the church. And so next week, we will be dealing with the events that take place at the rapture of the church. We will show the difference between the Lord coming for His saints and the Lord coming with His saints. Now, in both cases, the Lord will be coming with His saints, those who have already died will He bring with Him when He comes for us. But He is going to be coming for those who are alive and remain. Paul said, we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord are not going to precede those who have already died.

We'll get into that next week as we look at this passage of Scripture that teaches the subject of the rapture of the church. But this is something that Paul was constantly concerned about and expecting.

And I believe that is was by design that God wanted every period of church history to expect the Lord to come during their lifetime. I believe that the Lord wants us to live in a constant expectation of His coming for us. I believe that the purpose of His wanting that, is first of all, is to give to us a sense of urgency in getting the gospel out. We don't know how soon before the Lord comes. There is an urgency to get the message out to as many as we can before He comes back.

It not only gives a sense of urgency to getting the gospel out, it also gives to us a good sense of priority because the Lord is coming soon! And when He comes, we're going to leave all of this material, wealth, and whatever we've acquired. It's all going to burn! And it sort of gives us, really, that sense then of priority to give ourselves to the things of the Spirit, to the things that are eternal rather than the things that are temporal.

And then because the Lord is coming soon and at any time, and we don't know when, it gives a real impetus toward walking in purity and holiness. And so Paul here associates the coming of the Lord with our walking in purity.

John said (1 John 3:2-3), beloved now are we the sons of God. It doesn't yet appear what we are going to be, but we know that when He appears, we are going to be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. And He who has this hope purifies himself, even as he is pure. The hope of the coming of Jesus is a purifying hope. He who has this hope purifies himself, even as he is pure.

So next week, it is an exciting lessons, as we study concerning the rapture of the church.

Father, we thank You for the hope of the coming again of Jesus Christ. And Lord, we pray that You will help us, that You will perfect that which is lacking in our faith. And Lord, help us to increase more and more in love for one another and for You. And help us, oh Lord, to lay aside every weight and sin, which doth so easily beset us. And let us walk in purity and in holiness before You. Lord, make us pure even as You are pure. In Jesus' name. Amen.