



"PAUL'S GREAT LONGING"

Week #12; Aug. 16, 2026, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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SUMMARY: In 1 Thessalonians Ch. 2:17-20, Paul shares his heart. He loves this church he's writing to, and he wants to be with them, but he cannot. In this lesson, we see how a true Shepherd should love his sheep, how a true Christian leader is driven by the right passions, and how a true believer in Jesus Christ should faithfully endure this life and the challenges of it.

Review:

- Last week, in **vss. 13-16 of 1 Thessalonians**, we examined the issue of **'suffering for the cause of Christ'** through the lens of this new body of believers Paul was writing to.
- Paul told them they were not alone in what they were enduring. There were others who were also doing what was right and who were also going through the same things.
- We saw how Paul instructed us on three things we ought to do if we find ourselves truly **'suffering for the cause of Christ.'** We need to:
 - IMITATE those who are doing what's right
 - IMPLICATE those who are causing the pain
 - ISOLATE those who are doing what's wrong
- Paul's larger point is **'suffering for the cause of Christ'** may not necessarily be a situation of passivity or inaction.
- There are Godly and proper responses we ought to pursue. Wisdom is needed, and sometimes tough choices may need to be made.

NOTE: Now Paul transitions into another matter in **vss. 17-20**. Here, Paul gets very personal. He gets vulnerable as he shares **'his great longing'** (**READ**):

A. General overview (what's happening here?)

1. Paul wants these new believers to understand that he did not desert them when their persecutions began.
 - He admits he cannot be there with them, but that's not because he did not care for them or have concern for them.
 - In this last portion of **Ch. 2**, Paul informs this church in Thessalonica why he has not been back to see them, and he again reaffirms his love for them.
2. Paul had not been with them long, as evidenced by the context of **Acts 17:2**, but it was enough time that Paul had grown to greatly love this new body of believers.

- We learn from the book of **Acts** that it had not been Paul's plan to leave Thessalonica when he did; the unbelieving Jews had forced him to leave.
 - They had formed a mob, and they had come to the house of Jason, a new believer. This unruly mob had the mistaken idea that Paul and his companions were in Jason's house.
 - But when they did not find Paul and his companions there, this mob had dragged Jason and some of the other new Thessalonian believers before the city officials and had accused them of treason.
 - The book of **Acts** shows that Jason - and those with him - pledged themselves to be guarantors for Paul and his companions.
 - They put up their possessions as promissory bonds, promising that Paul would not cause any more disturbance in the city.
 - And so, Paul was forced to leave. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were sent away, by night, for their own safety, and for the safety of the new church. Paul did not leave willingly as we will see in the next chapter
3. But right now, in our passage today, Paul was grieved to see their persecution and **suffering for the cause of Christ** in the previous four verses.
- He wanted them to know he was separated from them **physically**, but he was not separated from them **in thought and spirit**.
 - As we learned before, Paul sent Timothy back to check up on them – and Paul was overjoyed when Timothy returned with a good report of how the new church was holding up.
 - He was exceedingly thankful for their growth and their spiritual fruit. We have seen this thankfulness Paul had in our previous lessons.
 - And now Paul is motivated to share **his great longing**. (And) we have some things to learn from what he shares.
4. I've put together a simple outline to help us uncover the main points of **vss. 17-20**
- **Paul's Separation**
 - **Paul's Motivation**
 - **Paul's Elation**

B. First, let's look at Paul's Separation (Cf. vss. 17-18)

NOTE: There are several aspects concerning Paul's separation from these brand-new Thessalonian believers that I want to call our attention to:

- **Paul says he was separated physically, but not mentally or emotionally.**
 - It's why he writes that he was away "*in person, but not in thoughts.*"
 - Paul says he was "torn away" from them. He had been forcibly removed. The choice was not his to shut things down.
 - He wanted to stay and minister as he had been doing, but others were threatened by the growth of his ministry, and so they were jealous and conniving.

- They were also dishonest, and disruptive – and that’s because they were spiritually bankrupt. They didn’t want the true work of God to continue.
 - They did not want the truth as we saw last week in **vs. 16**. They had **their own** ideas that they wanted to protect.
 - They had their own methods they wanted to pursue, and the clear teaching of God’s Word conflicted with those things. And so, they shut Paul’s ministry down.
- These disruptors – these conspirators (in fact - these spiritual leaders of the Jews) - had caused Paul and his companions great problems.
 - Their goal was to stop everything, and that’s why they had even misrepresented Paul’s group to city leaders.
 - Paul knew all of this, but there was little he could do under the circumstances. It was all outside of his control.
 - Yet his heart remained deeply loyal to what God had called Him to do. And so, while his direct ministry was unceremoniously discontinued in Thessalonica, Paul continued with his larger calling.
 - Despite the changes, Paul remained deeply connected to these new believers, and he wanted to reassure them of that.
- **Another aspect of Paul’s separation was his expressed desire to return**
 - He had an intense longing to see them again. Some translations say, “*see your face.*” Paul wanted that personal connection again.
 - (In fact) he clarifies further that he had tried repeatedly to come to them (**Cf. vs. 18**). He wanted to continue to disciple them.
 - We’re left with a bit of guessing here as to all that Paul had tried to do - - but the bottom line is he had been persistent in trying to reconnect personally.
- He was unsuccessful at this because he says, “*Satan stopped us.*”

NOTE: Let’s probe this a bit deeper. **How did Satan hinder or stop Paul?**

 - We need to remember that Satan is the “*prince of the power of the air*” (**Cf. Eph. 2:2**).
 - As such, Satan always opposes TRUE ministry. We learned that several lessons ago - - a mark of a true ministry is the severe opposition it receives.
 - I feel that Satan largely leaves alone those ministries which are mostly ineffective and un-biblical. He doesn’t need to worry about those types.
 - Satan will always seek to hinder the bold declaration of the Gospel, to create dissension in communities of believers, and to discourage and depress faithful Christian workers.
 - Paul’s main point is Satan is ultimately the one that energizes disobedience, motivates obstinance, and animates resistance.

NOTE: There is an interesting trifecta of opposition which Paul has stated he has faced. We see that to this point in our study. One commentator says Paul received....

a. **Opposition from the state (Cf. 1 Thess. 2:2)**

- Paul encountered fierce persecution from the leadership of Phillippi
- He had been beaten and imprisoned there before coming to Thessalonica (**Cf. Acts Ch. 16**).

b. **Opposition from society (Cf. 1 Thess. 2:14)**

- There were the Jews who opposed the church in Judea.
- There were also the Greeks (*'the countrymen'*) who opposed the church in Thessalonica.
- Bottom line: Paul's ministry was not welcome from the established culture and society in which his efforts were carried out.

c. **(and then today we read he had) Opposition from Satan**

- Ultimately, Satan is the force behind ALL opposition to true ministry, but it shows up through people, systems, cultures, etc. which Satan ultimately controls.

➤ **NOTE:** We don't know the details of how Satan stopped Paul, but our takeaway from this is Satan can - and will! - hinder true Christian work and workers.

- He has done it in the past, he does it now, and he will continue to do that in times ahead.
- However - - here's a question; think about this! - - was Satan **really** successful in thwarting Paul's ministry?
- No, Paul went on to minister in Berea, in Athens, and then in Corinth. Paul continued to do what God had called him to do.
- While Satan had stopped Paul from returning to Thessalonica, God used that frustrating circumstance for a larger good.
- Because of this interference by Satan, the Holy Spirit **also** inspired Paul to write the letters of **1 & 2 Thessalonians** that you and I are studying now.
- Furthermore, Paul sent Timothy in follow-up, and that provided valuable training for his young protégé in following up with evangelistic efforts.
- Sometimes, when an effective ministry is shut down, a larger one emerges. Remember, God remains sovereign behind it all.

C. Second, let's consider Paul's Motivation (Cf. vs. 19)

NOTE: This is an important matter to consider, especially when we try to understand the bigger picture of **Paul's great longing**. He frames the nature of his motivation as a rhetorical question in **vs. 19**.

- Paul's motivation is focused on these new Thessalonian believers, and we see that in how he regards them in **vs. 19**.
- He calls them his *'hope, his joy, his crown in which (he) will glory in the presence of his Lord Jesus when He comes.'*

- There are several points to be made here, and I will address them as one larger thought continuum.
 - Paul was not one to look back, or to succumb to regret, resentment, or remorse.
 - Instead, Paul preserved his view of looking ahead and rejoicing. And that's because, for the true believer in Jesus Christ, **the best is yet to come!**
 - By faith, and by his trust in the Word of God, Paul saw himself and his friends in the presence of Jesus Christ - - in glory!
 - Paul always took the long view of things. While he physically lived in the **present situation**, he controlled his actions and attitudes by the **future situation**.
 - His motives were governed by what God would do in the long view. He knew that Jesus Christ would return.
 - Paul knew Jesus would reward him for his faithful endurance in one direction. He knew that on that day, the saints from Thessalonica would bring glory to God, and they would bring joy to Paul's heart.

NOTE: We don't sing the old hymns anymore – or we **rarely** do – because they are chock full of sound doctrine, and so they too have come under attack and ridicule. They've been replaced by shallow (and often theologically suspect) 'praise and worship' music.

- ✓ But perhaps you remember that old hymn, "It Will Be Worth It All." It goes on to say that everything will make sense – and all our trials will seem so small "*when we see Jesus.*"
- ✓ That's Paul's point here in this passage. That's the long view. That's the right view.
- ✓ We all – as true believers – will someday stand at the Judgement Seat of Christ (the 'bema seat'), and we will give an accounting for the lives we lived and the choices we made while on this earth.
- ✓ That ought to motivate us – as it motivated Paul here – to be faithful in spite of our many difficulties and challenges.
 - Paul's hope and joy were not defined by his temporary circumstances. They were governed by his eternal assurances.
 - He regarded the eternal lives of these Thessalonian believers as his 'crown' - - they would be his 'prize' if you will, when they were all together in glory.
 - That's why Paul answers his own question about what motivates him. He says at the end of **vs. 19** that his motivation "*is you!*"
 - He's writing to these new Thessalonian believers, and he tells them he is driven onward, he is excited, and he is motivated - - because of them!

NOTE: Paul's **motivation** was not only his long view of eternity and glory, but it was directly tied to his anticipation of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. That's the Rapture, and Paul mentions this at the end of **vs. 19** ("*when He comes*").

- If you knew Jesus Christ was returning in 45 minutes – how would that change what you do, how you think, and what you value?
- That's heavy 'food for thought,' but that's exactly how we **SHOULD** think.
- Paul's **motivation** was also knowing Jesus Christ could return at any moment. And so he conducted himself accordingly...

D. (and then third, and last) let's briefly look at Paul's elation (Cf. vs. 20)

NOTE: This point is closely tied to the one just before, but here Paul re-emphasizes the reason for **his great longing** and the cause of his motivation:

- (and that is the fact that) these new Thessalonian believers are Paul's glory and joy.
 - Here, Paul takes his assurances about the future, and he applies them to the present.
 - These new believers were **continually** a source of glory and joy to Paul. He didn't have to wait to know that; he knew it **NOW**.
 - Paul kept up an attitude which was cheerful and glad. It was a happiness – if you will – that had nothing to do with how the world defines that.
 - It was a happiness, a 'joy' that was based upon the unchanging promises and immutable character of God.
 - This kind of 'joy' in the Greek meaning includes a sense of well-being, and for the true believer that well-being is knowing that all is **RIGHT** between that person and the Lord.

NOTE: Let me conclude with a few takeaways or applications for you and I from this passage:

1. Separation should not diminish our spiritual love

- We can – and we **should** – be deeply invested into those we are called to serve
- It's not an issue of our proximity. It is, instead, an issue of our personal passion
- People are not reached by our programs, our processes, or our possessions
- Our spiritual love – our spiritual calling in Christ – is to invest into others based on what Jesus has invested into us.
- He has invested everything **FOR** us. We need to invest everything **FOR** Him.

2. Opposition should not deter our purpose in Christ

- The opposition we face – as we have learned – is a key indicator of true ministry

- Satan has little to care about or be concerned with when we are doing things **his** way, and when we are succumbing to **his** disruptions
- The more we find ourselves opposed in doing the Lord's work, the more we need to cling to the promises we have for the long run. And that brings me to...

3. Longing should not distract from our eternal focus

- It's easy to let our personal passions override the greatest 'boast' we have in Jesus Christ - - and that is transforming the lives of those we are ministering to
- We all have the right sort of longings. We all have a desire for things that are good and proper
- But when those things begin to dim our perspective of what awaits us – then we need to get our minds and hearts back to a right view
- We need to stay focused on the Lord's imminent return, and on the glory and joy that awaits us when we gain our **future** rewards for our **present** devotion to Christ

NEXT WEEK: We begin **chapter 3**. We will learn what it means to '**Be Afraid for the Right Reasons.**'



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And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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