

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

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Sunday Morning
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Heartaches, Hardships, and Hope in the Ministry

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

INTRODUCTION

This morning we come to the close of 1 Thessalonians 2. It is a good example of how the man made Addresses (Chapters & Verse Numbers), though helpful in the cause of locating words and events, are not always helpful in regards to preserving the flow and unity of themes. The

THOUGHT that begins in Verse 17 actually continues into chapter 3. The unity of this section would have been better preserved if the new chapter had been made to begin at 1 Thessalonians 2:17 instead. It would appear that the present chapter division was made in the endeavor to have each chapter close with a direct reference to the return of the Lord.

As we study this section we are going to learn from Paul about:

- the HEARTACHE
- the HARDSHIPS, and
- the HOPE of the Minister.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 (ESV) But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.

The FIRST thing we see here is a heart that is ACHING. There are many who view Paul as being a hard and cold man:

- Kind of the General Patton / High Theologian of the NT
- Willing to endure all things for the elect
- Agonizing towards the finish line of his life and ministry
- Keeping his body under (Beaten, starved, shipwrecked)
- Refusing to march into the mission field with anyone less committed
- Challenging believers to FOLLOW his example
- And then he writes the high theology of the NT.

But THEN — we read sections of his letters like the one before us this morning — and we do not see a coldhearted soldier or detached academic. The OPPOSITE is true — Paul was a man who LOVED DEEPLY. It was THAT DEPTH of love that made him capable of HURTING DEEPLY over those he loved. ONE KEY to understanding Paul's HEARTACHE — and his even his STERNNESS — is wrapped up in the word "Brothers"

INSIGHT:

Our word Philadelphia comes in part from this word.



- From the Greek adelphos
- PREFIX a = denoting unity
- SUFFIX delphús = womb

LITERALLY – one born from same womb. A male having the same father and mother as reference person.

Paul uses it FIGURATIVELY to express the intimacy of relationship in the Body of Christ. The word BROTHER has become cliché. “Bro” is used so commonly without the appreciation that Paul had for it’s true meaning.

REALITY – Christians have truly been BORN AGAIN. In their 2nd birth they share the same Father – God. A Christian is someone who has been BEGOTTEN by God

1 John 5:1 (ESV) Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God...

By His WILL

John 1:12-13 (ESV) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

By His WORD

James 1:18 (ESV) Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth,

1 Peter 1:23 (ESV) since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

CRUCIAL:

The Church is a family – and God is our great heavenly Father.

I never really had a relationship with my dad. Every RIGHT thing I know about being a dad comes from what I have come to know and experience from my Heavenly Father who loves me. JUST HOW DEEP and REAL is the relationship between believers and Jesus – Believers and other believers? On one occasion when Jesus was informed that his mother and brothers were waiting for him, Jesus replied – speaking of His disciples –

Matthew 12:47-49 “...these are my mother and brothers”

TRUTH –

Jesus defines for us the NATURE of the spiritual relationship between believers. He says that it is as rich and deep as biological ties – and in many ways even richer and deeper! When Paul calls them BROTHERS – He had ALL of that in mind and heart!

SO – it is there that we begin to sense the PATHOS in the passage, to understand the HEARTACHE in Paul’s words. But there are TWO other things that help us understand the depth of Paul’s love and the depth of his heartache

1.) WHERE he was when he wrote the them

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians when he was ministering by himself in the city of Corinth. Being far away from loved ones is a very unpleasant experience. It was bleak and he was ready to walk away from the city.

2.) WHY he was away from them

1 Thessalonians 2:17 (ESV) ..since we were torn away from you,...

- Torn away = *aporphanizo*
- PREFIX *apó* = preposition meaning from, away from, (speaks of a rupture of a former relationship or any separation of one thing from another by which the union or fellowship of the two is destroyed)
- SUFFIX *orphanós* = an orphan (a child deprived of one or usually both parents, means to be made or caused to be an orphan).

i) Used figuratively to speak of an unwanted separation as when one is torn away from, deprived of contact or unwillingly separated from.

ii) It means to cause someone to be spatially separated with the implication of emotional deprivation.

iii) to separate and deprive a child of his/her parents.

CRUCIAL INSIGHT:

This verse is the only use of this verb in Scripture.

The Holy Spirit chose THIS word to unpack for us the HEARTACHE of ministry that can ONLY COME from the nature of God's love for His children. From the reality of and the nature of belonging to the family of God.

In the Book of Acts — Luke tells us that this separation was abrupt and violent...

Acts 17:6-10 (ESV) And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them (Paul - Silas - Timothy), and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." 8And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. 9And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. 10The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.

The separation of Paul from the Thessalonians was MORE THAN the physical act of separation! Paul's greatest suffering from this persecution was because

- he was separated from his new-born brothers and sisters — men and women he had led to faith in Christ.
- these new-born brothers and sisters were deprived of their teacher — like children orphaned

NOTE WELL:

Though there was a spatial separation between them — though they were out of sight — they were not out of mind

1 Thessalonians 2:17 (ESV)...we were torn away from you, brothers, in person not in heart...

In the center of who he was he was still caring for them. HOW DEEP was his love for them? How MUCH did his heart ACHE to be with them?

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 (ESV) ...we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.

The heartache of being separated from them was so great that Paul willingly forgot the danger that had driven him from Thessalonica. The heartache of being separated from them was so great that Paul willingly forgot the cruelty he had experienced there.

1 Thessalonians 2:17 (ESV) ...we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire...

- Endeavored = spoudazo
- Zealous concentration and diligent effort, one's best effort!

Paul had a plan — made preparations - we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire

- epithumia — from verb epithumeo
- PREFIX epi = upon
- SUFFIX thumos = passion

1 Thessalonians 2:18 (ESV) 18because we wanted to come to you ...

Here's WHY Paul PASSIONATELY exerted Zealous concentration and diligent effort — to make a plan — and make preparations.

we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again because we wanted to come to you

"wanted"

- equals a decision of the will, implying purpose and freedom of choice. The kind of resolution that urges on to action.

KEY OBSERVATION:

Paul made more than ONE attempt at seeing them. But his HEARTACHE was followed by HARSHIP

"Again and again"

- means both once and again

He TRIED and TRIED, but Satan hindered us.

LISTEN —

- The most genuine of love
- The most zealous efforts
- The most holy passion to serve and love

Does NOT make life and ministry EASY.

Here's what that kind of love will get you: You will discover that there is a very real and very powerful ADVERSARY to the Glory and Kingdom and purposes of God.

Satan — Literally — an adversary. He is the constant enemy of God and man

Ezekiel tells us that BEFORE he rebelled against God that he was the anointed cherub that covers.

Ezekiel 28:14 (ESV) You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.

Commentators say that this means 1 of 2 things:

- 1.) the CHERUB that guarded the gates of Paradise, and kept the way of the tree of life; or
- 2.) one of the cherubs whose wings, spread out, covered the mercy-seat.

He is also called in the Scriptures:

1. the devil
2. the wicked one
3. the prince of the power of the air
4. the prince of this world
5. the serpent
6. the god of this world
7. the tempter

Paul understood -

- the **PERSON** of the devil
- The **PERSISTANT OPPOSITION** of the devil

Ephesians 6:10-13 (ESV) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

“Satan hindered us”.

Hindered is from

- PREFIX en = in
- SUFFIX kópto = cut down, strike

i) strictly means to knock or cut into

ii) to impede one’s course by cutting off his way

KEY INSIGHT:

In classic Greek egkopto was a military term – It gives a powerful word picture.

One of the countermeasures an ancient army would take against the opposition was to dig a massive trench that would prevent enemy troops from reaching its men. Another way to frustrate the enemy’s progress would be to tear up a brick or stone road so that he could not traverse it. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use THIS word in describing the supernatural opposition of the devil to obstruct Paul’s desire and attempts to revisit Thessalonica.

PRACTICAL:

There are times when the Spirit forbids (Acts 16:6), and times when Satan hinders. I don’t understand all of that all of the time. But here are the things of which I am ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN. I am convinced that all of Satan’s successes are **by God’s PERMISSION** and **for God’s PURPOSES**.

Example: The persecution of the Church in Jerusalem lead to the Gospel being spread to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world.

Example: Peter wrote to the DIASPORA - the SCATTERED SEED - That’s how God saw their lives.

I know that when I am down that Satan is NOT compassionate - He jumps on me with both feet. I am convinced that this stuff is NOT something that we can plot on a colored break away pie chart.

- 15% Richard’s sin
- 25% unbelief
- 45% the result of the fallen world

- 15% Satan

NO - It's 100% in the providence of God.

We have seen:

- 1) the **HEARTACHE** of Ministry
- 2) the **HARDSHIP** of the Ministry

Finally – We see **WHY** Paul was able to minister faithfully and lovingly to these saints – through the HEARTACHE and in the face of the HARDSHIP.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (ESV) For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20For you are our glory and joy.

Paul was able to minister faithfully and lovingly to these saints because he saw them in the light of Christ's coming. He was looking forward to the glorious day when he would rejoice over them in the presence of Christ!

AGAIN – We see in Paul the life and love of Jesus

Jesus endured the cross -

Hebrews 12:2 (ESV) "...for the joy that was set before Him..." .

Jesus endured the Cross because of the "joy" is of seeing you and me FORGIVEN and in His presence forever.

Jude v.24 (ESV) Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

Paul could endure

- all of the HEARTACHE involved in the ministry
- all of the HARDSHIP of Satan hindering

For this same joy.

KEY QUESTION:

Do we rejoice at the thought of seeing Jesus one day?

THAT was the whole reason for the ALL that Paul endured in ministering to the Thessalonians!

Isn't THAT why

- We PRAY for those around us who don't know Jesus?
- We SHARE with them?

And when they get saved - all of the hassle that you went through is irrelevant in light of seeing them in the presence of the Lord! They're SAVED and they're going to be with you in heaven!

What is it all about?

If it's about a life free of heartache – then keep your Christianity superficial and cliché, and it will be free of the kind of heartache that can only come from loving Jesus and loving the Body of Christ. If it's about being

saved and on your way to heaven — with as few of hardships of spiritual warfare as possible then keep your Christianity superficial and cliché, And Satan won't oppose you — You will run at the first taste of hardship.

BUT — If you by the grace of God begin to personally grasp and appreciate the privilege and glory of being born again, the reality of having the One, True and Living God as your Father - THEN — You will begin to comprehend the love of God, not just for yourself but also for those who — by virtue of being born again — are your BROTHERS / SISTERS in CHRIST.

And you will find that your heart will be filled with such a deep love that it will be capable of deep hurt: When you see their needs, When you are separated from them by distance and incapable of serving them, Your life of Christian Cliché and superficiality will be WRECKED; Your heart will ACHE to be with them; Your mind will be constantly planning to make a way to serve them; Your old social calendar will be wrecked; Not that you won't have date nights or time spent with family, or friends, or time spent on vacation; But you will begin to see ALL of life wrapped up in your roll on God's economy to love and serve His children — to the end that Jesus would be exalted in their lives!

AND — If you by the grace of God begin to love and serve God and His children in that way; You WILL experience HARDHSIPS because Your ache to serve God and His children will be met by the countermeasures of your adversary the devil. He will find ways to dig massive trenches intended to prevent you from reaching your brothers and sisters. He will find ways to tear up paths of ministry.

AND — If you — by the grace of God — begin to love and serve God and His children in that way: You will find that the HOPE of heaven will carry the day! You will find that the HOPE of seeing men and women in the presence of God will mitigate against the HEARTACHE and HARDSHIPS of ministry.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (ESV) For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20For you are our glory and joy.

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