

# In Times of Difficulty, We must Work Together.

10.11.2020

Missions Sunday

1 Thessalonians 3:1–13 (CSB)

## ANXIETY IN ATHENS

**3** Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens. <sup>2</sup>And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, <sup>3</sup>so that no one will be shaken by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. <sup>4</sup>In fact, when we were with you, we told you in advance that we were going to experience affliction, and as you know, it happened. <sup>5</sup>For this reason, when I could no longer stand it, I also sent him to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing.

## ENCOURAGED BY TIMOTHY

<sup>6</sup>But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news about your faith and love. He reported that you always have good memories of us and that you long to see us, as we also long to see you. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and affliction, we were encouraged about you through your faith. <sup>8</sup>For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you, <sup>10</sup>as we pray very earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith?

## PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

<sup>11</sup>Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. <sup>12</sup>And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you. <sup>13</sup>May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

Intro. Biblical Christianity is designed to be different than the surrounding world.

A. I am convinced that there are characteristics that should make us stand out from everyone else.

1. We should be more loving than non-believers.
2. We should be more united than non-believers.
3. We should be more hopeful than non-believers.
4. We should be more Christ-like (please stop expecting non-Christians to be Christ-like).

B. Christians should be radically different from the world, and this is especially true during times of difficulty.

1. All through 1 Thessalonians, Paul is helping the Church to withstand pressure.
2. Have you ever been to a Doctor and they said, "you are going to feel a little pressure?"
  - a. That's code for "it's going to hurt".
  - b. You are fixing to feel violated.
3. When Paul was in Thessalonica, he warned them that they were going to feel pressure.
4. They were destined to experience difficulty.
  - a. Verse 3, Paul says that the church was "appointed" to experience affliction.
  - b. **You can't escape what God has appointed.**
  - c. Instead, you embrace it.

C. Paul, in 1 Thess. 3, is encouraging them to embrace what God has appointed.

1. He gives 3 pieces of advice that will help all of us overcome the pressure we are facing.
2. First, we must recognize that we are not called to operate alone.
3. Second, we must recognize that we are not called to suffer alone.
4. Lastly, we must recognize that we are not called to wait alone.

### 1. We are not called to operate alone. Vs 1-5

A. If anyone could have had done ministry alone, it would have been the Apostle Paul.

1. He had the knowledge.
  - a. He had the training,
  - b. He had the ability.
2. Yet, through all of the NT, we never see him doing ministry alone.
3. He is intentionally surrounded himself with others of like mind and heart.

B. One of the many things that stands out in his letter to Thessalonica is his love and concern for the people.

1. In 2:19, Paul said that the Thessalonians was his future hope, joy and crown in Jesus' presence.
  - a. How can we possibly hate people when the Bible teaches that they are part of our future reward?
  - b. Paul saw troubled, hurting, lost, and broken people not as problems to be fixed but people to be loved toward Jesus.

c. Someday, when I stand before Christ, I will look around and many of you will be part of my crown of boasting in the presence of the Lord!

d. That is how important people are in the Kingdom.

*2. When these missionaries give their lives in faraway places, they do so knowing that the people they serve are part of the reward for service!*

a. When we, as a church, serve kids and teens, work in the nursery, or minister at our outreaches, the people we come in contact are part the prize!

1. This building is not our reward.

2. Notoriety, riches, and fame are not our prize.

3. People, being in the presence of Jesus, is our prize and reward.

b. Paul didn't minister for money or fame.

c. Paul ministered out of his love for Jesus.

d. And when we Love Jesus we will love people.

C. A large part of Paul's concern for the church was because he understood that: **Isolation makes us targets for the enemy.**

<sup>5</sup>For this reason, when I could no longer stand it, I also sent him to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing.

1. Many Christians understand salvation as something that, once it happens, it can never be threatened.

2. But, if that was true, why is Paul concerned about the saved in Thessalonica?

a. Throughout the New Testament, believers are commanded to endure and overcome.

b. Our faith and belief are not static; they are to be active and ever increasing.

c. There isn't room in our walk with Jesus to stop and stay.

d. The call of Jesus to "pick up our cross and follow Him", is not a one and done moment, but a daily call.

3. If you stop following Jesus, you become a target for the tempter.

D. One of the dangers before us today is that many believers are being isolated.

1. Many are not participating in the body of Christ like we should.

2. When we stay isolated, we become easier targets for the enemy.

a. Not only does he target us with things like depression, fear, and hopelessness.

b. He especially focuses upon our relationship with Jesus.

c. The Tempter is looking for opportunities to challenge your relationship with Jesus.

1. Let me show you from Scripture what I'm talking about:

James 1:12-15 (CSB)

<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

<sup>13</sup>No one undergoing a trial should say, "I am being tempted by God," since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone. <sup>14</sup>But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. <sup>15</sup>Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.

## 2. 1 Peter 5:8 (CSB)

<sup>8</sup>Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.

3. The Apostles understood that Satan is actively working against us.

- a. He is seeking targets to destroy and devour.
- b. He is looking to draw us away from Christ and the Church by evil desires so that he might kill us.
- c. Don't make yourself an easy target.

E. One of the primary attacks of the enemy involves suffering and persecution.

1. The Church has been under attack since day 1.
2. As soon as Jesus was born, Satan used King Herod to kill him.
3. There has been war with Satan since the beginning, and **although Satan is defeated, he still has teeth.**
4. He can still inflict pain and wreak havoc in the lives of people.
  - a. Just look around us, and we can see the terrible pain and destruction the enemy is bringing.
  - b. Do you think that the rioting and lawless is coming from God?
  - c. God is not the source of abortion, or drug use, or murder.
  - d. The tempter is trying to do what he can in the short time he has.
5. Let us work together.
6. Let us continue to worship together.

7. Commit yourself to a local church and submit to spiritual authority, so that we are not tempted and our work is in vain.

## 2. We are not called to suffer or endure alone. Vs 6-10

A. Paul couldn't stand being separated from the Thessalonians while they endured persecution and suffering.

1. Like all New Testament churches, the believers in Thessalonica encountered opposition and persecution.

2. In fact. Paul had warned them that persecution would come.

B. Notice that Paul prepared the church for persecution.

1. Vs. 3b, Paul says "we are appointed to experience affliction".

2. Vs 4, Paul reminds them that he warned them in advance that opposition would happen.

3. Someone once said that, "It is better to be a warrior in a garden than a gardener in a war".

a. The difference is training and mindset.

b. Paul knew that he couldn't, in good conscience, prepare the Church for peace.

c. Paul knew that, as the Church began to upset the world and the powers of Darkness, that a battle would rage.

4. Paul knew that the enemy would do everything within its power to stop the spread of the Gospel of Jesus.

a. Let me tell us today, that the enemy is raging against the Church.

b. The days ahead could be some of the most difficult times for Christians that America has ever experienced.

c. But the Good News is that the Church is designed to thrive under-pressure.

d. Because the Spirit that lives within us is more than enough to overcome the enemy around about us.

C. However, we cannot fully experience the power of the Spirit if we neglect the community of believers.

1. When the Spirit was poured out in Acts 2, it was one person in a room by themselves.
2. Instead, **there were 120 people gathered in the same place, for the same purpose, for the same promise.**
3. You and I were designed to be part of something bigger than just ourselves.
4. This is especially important in the difficult times.

D. One of the most human fears is the fear of dying alone.

1. We were created to live in community.
2. We were created to worship in community.
- 3 We were created to celebrate as a community and to endure suffering as a community.
4. When one part of the body hurts, the whole-body hurts.
5. This is God's design.

E. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul is wanting to connect with the people in Thessalonica to make sure they knew they were not alone.

1. 1 Thes. 3:14, Paul reminded them that, because of their suffering, they were experiencing the same thing that God's churches were experiencing elsewhere.
2. They were not alone in their enduring.
3. They were not alone in their difficulty.
4. They were not alone in their experience.
5. **If the day comes when American Christianity experiences great persecution, know that our brothers and sisters in Iran, China, India, Russia, and all over the globe will welcome us in becoming "imitators of God's churches in Christ Jesus".** Vs. 14.

F. Therefore, be careful not to isolate yourself in the days to come.

1. Don't pull back from each other, but lean in.
2. Don't make yourself into an easy target by getting off by yourself.
  - a. Know that this is true for believers and churches.
  - b. Now is not the time for us to focus only upon ourselves, and our problems, and our obstacles.
  - c. IF there was ever a time to give financially to missions, it is now.
  - d. If there was ever a time to be poured out as a living sacrifice for the Kingdom of Christ, it is now.
  - e. If there was ever a time to say YES!!! To Jesus, it is now.
  - f. Lean in to what God is doing in our world.

### 3. We are not called to wait alone.

A. Paul ends this chapter with a prayer for the church.

1. He prays specifically that their love for each other and for everyone will increase and overflow.
2. This is important because Jesus said in **Matthew 24:12** that in the Last Days, "Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold."
3. **Difficulty, opposition, suffering, and frustration are NOT excuses for us to stop loving people.**
4. We should be asking God to help us LOVE PEOPLE better.

B. Paul makes this assumption BECAUSE of Jesus' return.

1. "Vs. 13: May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

2. As we prepare for Jesus' return, we prepare by making our hearts blameless in holiness.

3. During this election season, do you find yourself hating people?

4. If so, don't give into the temptation of Satan.

a. Remember earlier, Paul said that he feared the tempter had tempted them and his labor had been wasted.

b. Don't give in to the temptation to hate.

c. Because haters do not enter into the kingdom of God.

C. Lastly, when Jesus returns, let Him not find us alone.

1. Commit yourself to worshipping with other believers.

2. And when Jesus returns, take someone with you.

3. When Jesus returns, I want to take people with me!

a. Our missionaries have committed themselves to go to another land, that isn't their home and to make it their home.

b. They have been called to leave their family, and to endeavor to save someone else's family.

c. They have been called to a foreign people, and to love them like their own.

d. Although you may not be called to go, you are called to love.

Closing: Let us take a few moments to pray and to seek God.

A. First, let us ask God to prepare our hearts for His return.

1. If there is any hate, ask that the Lord replaces your hate with love. (Be Specific)

2. Ask God to put His burden upon your heart to see the lost saved.

3. Ask God to strengthen and empower you to overcome every obstacle that the enemy places in front of us so that we might be ready for Jesus' return.

Prayer.

B. Second, I want to ask you to, once again, make a commitment to giving financially to what we call missions.

1. I believe that every person deserves to hear about Jesus at least once in their lifetime in a way that they can understand.

2. God has called these families, and many like them, to go and share Jesus.

3. And He has called churches like us to support them with our friendship, our prayers, and our blessings.

4. Our missionaries visit our church to remind us that NONE of us are called to do this alone.

a. A missionary should be an encouragement to the local church.

b. And the local church should be an encouragement to the missionary.

c. Missionaries, I endeavor to always be an encourager of the calling that God has for your life.

5. Together, God can use all of us to do AMAZING things in our world.

We are going to make sure you have a Faith Promise form this morning and, after we pray, will you join with me in endeavoring to give to missions in the last part of 2020 and into 2021?