

1 Thessalonians 3:1-8 – “Standing Firm in Faith”

Summary Statement:

In this passage, Paul expresses his deep concern for the Thessalonian believers, highlighting the importance of their faith amidst trials. He shares how he sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage them, longing to hear about their faith and if they're standing strong in the Lord.

Outline:

- 1) Paul's Concern for the Church – 3:1-3
- 2) Paul's Counsel to the Church – 3:4-5
- 3) Paul's Comfort from the Church – 3:6-8

1. Paul's Concern for the Church – 3:1-3

3:1 - *Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,*

Now when we read this it sounds like Paul is tapping out. That he has reached a point where he just could not take it any longer. What was it that he could no longer endure? It was being away from these new believers in Thessalonica. At the end of chapter 2 Paul shared how they longed to see them again and tried to come to them time and time again, but Satan hindered them (2:17-18). This is not Paul reaching a point of high anxiety or giving up, this is Paul who longingly desired to be with these new believers to be a support to them.

- This word **endure** (which we'll see again in vs. 5) is the Greek word *stegō* and it means to protect or keep by covering; to preserve.
- Paul's desire has been to protect these new believers and not allow anything to creep in that would affect them negatively.
- Remember the kind of condition Paul endured in Thessalonica. People gathered a mob to come against Paul and shut him down. He had just been flogged and imprisoned in Philippi. He's concerned these new Christians would want to give up if those kind of conditions were still happening. He's wanting to do everything he can to protect them and see them walking strong in the Lord.

When it became clear that Paul was unable to go to them himself, he was willing to be left alone in Athens and send Timothy to check in on them.

This was sacrificial on Paul's part. To be left alone meant he was giving up his personal support and travel companions. Paul loved being with others. In this day and especially being in a foreign place, having people with you was a huge blessing. Especially when you're Paul and regularly dealing with opposition, and at times, beatings or imprisonment. Having people with you through this was a great benefit and encouragement. But now Paul is willing to go it alone for the sake of sending Timothy to these Thessalonian believers. (Perhaps Timothy is secretly elated that he's getting a break from Paul. Maybe he's thinking, *Pick me! I'll go!* Maybe he's thinking he'll have a bit of a reprieve from the opposition). So Paul was willing to forego personal comfort for the sake of having others taken care of. So Timothy is sent...

- Most likely Silas is there too but is sent on to go and minister to some other places up north.
- Paul was a guy that loved to use others to minister on behalf of the gospel. He didn't hoard these opportunities for himself. He didn't have that attitude like he was the only one capable of doing it.

3:2 - *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,*

So, Timothy visits the Thessalonians to see how they are doing.

Now some of the people may have felt ripped off not having Paul come himself. Timothy was still fairly young and not as experienced as Paul. But Paul gives a great commendation of Timothy here. He's a **brother**. This guy is family!

- This passage has some great encouragement for the benefits and blessings of the body of Christ and Church community. And just like family, there may be some dysfunction at times, but you don't just give up, you work together. You're family! Blood is thicker than water, and if you've been purchased by the blood of Jesus then you should be delighted in the opportunity we have to do life together with people we're so closely linked to.

Paul also says he's a **minister of God**. A minister is rightly translated as servant. This is who Timothy was. He was ready to go and do whatever was necessary. We're all called to be ministers of God. Now that may carry with it imagery of preaching behind a pulpit or counseling people, but at its truest, simplest form it's

just being a servant. This is something we're all called to be to one another. So minister to one another. Timothy did this well.

And he's a **fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ**. Paul says Timothy didn't go out with his own agenda, he simply wanted to build people up in the gospel of Christ – the very thing Paul desired to do. Timothy was coming to them as a fellow laborer. What Paul would do, Timothy would do.

Paul later gave a very big commendation of Timothy to the church at Philippi: **Philippians 2:20–22**, *"For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel."*

What was the objective of this trip? To **establish** and **encourage**. This is really the heart and theme behind this chapter.

- "The Greek word for **establish** (stērizō [4741]) is used in other contexts with the idea of buttressing or supporting a structure.^[13] Like a stone buttress designed to keep a potentially unstable building from faltering, Timothy attached himself to the Thessalonian believers in order to keep them from shifting and buckling in the storms of controversy and tremors of persecution."¹
- The Greek word for **encourage** is parakaleō, which means to come alongside; to exhort. The idea here is to encourage these believers to take courage. To be bold in the midst of persecution.

Paul's focus was for these believers in Thessalonica to be established and encouraged in their faith. The words **your faith** are used 5 times in this chapter (2, 5, 6, 7, 10). Paul had a deep concern regarding their faith, and wanted them to be established, strengthened, and encouraged in it. There was good reason for it...

3:3 - that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

^[13] Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key*, 594.

¹ Swindoll, C. R. (2016). *Insights on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Vol. 10, p. 37). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

These new believers were facing affliction in the form of persecution. Paul faced this when they came to Thessalonica on their mission trip. The Jews were upset at this gospel message and gathered evil people from the marketplace to form a mob against Paul (Acts 17:5). Paul managed to get out of town before being found, but these new believers evidently faced the wrath of this worked up mob.

Paul did not want to see their faith **shaken** by these things.

- This word **shaken** is the Greek word *sainō*. It's been associated with the wagging of a dog's tail. It implies a wavering, unsettling or agitation. When applied to the situation in Thessalonica, Paul was concerned for these believers becoming agitated or shaken by those looking to draw them away from the gospel and faith in Jesus to be pulled back into Judaism or paganism. Paul was worried that because of persecution, they may waver in their faith.

And instead of trying to downplay this sort of persecution or act as though it shouldn't really last too long, Paul says quite the opposite – ***we are appointed to this***. WHAT!?!?! Some of you may be asking or hoping that's a typo. Shouldn't it say we're *avoiding* this?

Why are we appointed to this? Because we live in a world that is hostile to the things of God. We wish it weren't so, but the world has largely been in rebellion to God since the beginning. And a world hostile to Jesus isn't going to be too warm to those who are followers of Jesus.

For this reason, Paul warned those in Thessalonica right from the beginning...

2. Paul's Counsel to the Church – 3:4-5

3:4 - *For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.*

Paul laid it on them right from the beginning that becoming followers of Jesus wasn't going to prevent suffering, it was going to invite suffering.

We do a disservice if we don't let people know that accepting Jesus as Saviour does not guarantee an easy life – but it does guarantee an eternal life. And it's the reality of an eternal life with Jesus that allows us to overcome the present and temporary sufferings of this world.

We're given ample warning and reminders in Scripture that we're appointed to suffer tribulation.

Matthew 24:9, *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake."*

John 16:2, *"They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."*

Acts 14:22, *"strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"*

Philippians 1:29, *"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,"*

2 Timothy 3:12, *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."*

1 Peter 2:21, *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:"*

John 16:33, *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

Paul was diligent to lay it all on the line. There was no sugar coating what a life in Jesus meant. It's easy to do this today and try to win people through easy believism; where we want people to think that receiving Jesus means everything is going to be made instantly better. It is in the spiritual realm and in our spiritual position, but it may not always be that in the physical realm. Too often people drift away when they find out that sickness is not always healed, job promotions are not always granted, a groom or bride is not always dropping from the heavens. If you're life in Jesus is based on externals you're going to quickly be disillusioned. It's no wonder Jesus said if you're going to come after Him you need to deny yourself and take up your cross to follow Him (Luke 9:23).

- If you've laid down your life then you're not bothered when tribulation comes. You're not worried about suffering. As Paul said in **Colossians 3:3**, *"...you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."*

There's a much better life that we're counting on. That's why having an eternal view is so important. It provides hope in the face of difficulty. It reminds us that the sufferings of this world are worth it in light of what we have in Jesus and what is coming our way for all eternity. This is why Paul concludes each chapter in 1 Thessalonians with a reminder of Christ's coming.

3:5 - *For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.*

So Paul was so concerned for these believers that he just couldn't stand it any longer. He had to know how they were doing. He had to send Timothy to get word on how they were doing in their faith.

- This gives us some insight into the kind of person Paul was. Not that we needed more clues or proof. But Paul didn't just save people and then put a little notch on his belt and then move on. He wanted to see these people flourishing in their faith. Planted and rooted in the Word.

He knew all too well that there is a very real enemy looking to steal that seed that's been planted. The parable of the soils illustrates that well for us.

- Some seed fell on the way side and the enemy just came and plucked it up. Some seed fell upon the stony places, but there's no place for it to take root. So when tribulation or persecution arose, there was nothing to stabilize it. Some fell upon the thorns which pictured the deceitfulness of riches which choked out any growth of the word (Matthew 13:18-21). These are all tactics of Satan.
- Paul wanted to be sure that their work there was not in vain. He wanted to make sure that these believers were still continuing on in their faith and growing despite the enemy lurking about to devour.

This is a good lesson for us to be those that remain invested in people. Their salvation may be on the line. We rejoice when someone gives their life to the Lord, but understand, that's the starting point, not the finish line. These are people that need to grow and be established, so that when the enemy comes, they will not waver or falter.

3. Paul's Comfort from the Church – 3:6-8

3:6-7 - *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—⁷ therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.*

When Timothy returned, it was time for Paul to breathe a big sigh of relief. He's now gotten word that the new Christians in Thessalonica are going strong in their **faith and love**. And not only that, but they don't have any ill will toward Paul.

- They weren't thinking, *'Paul stay where you are! Don't come near us. Trouble seems to follow you, so keep your distance. Let us just exist in peace.'*
- No way! They have **good remembrance** of them, even if Paul, Silas, and Timothy had to flee town quickly under persecution. They're even longing to see them again; they're looking forward to a great reunion.

And notice the kind of affect this had on Paul and his companions – they were comforted! Even when going through affliction and distress, they were thankful for the report of these believers continuing on in their faith.

Paul wasn't just thankful, he was invigorated by this report...

3:8 - **For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.**

This brought fresh wind in the sails for Paul and his boys to see that these Thessalonian believers were standing fast in the Lord. This is what faith does. Faith causes the believer to endure and persevere even when circumstances in front of them may seem overwhelming.

- Now understand, there is the initial faith by which a person reaches out to Jesus and surrenders their life to Him to find forgiveness of sins and everlasting life.
- But then there is continued faith by which we continue to walk as followers of Jesus. That's a much better descriptor of a Christian. Are you following Jesus? That's going to take faith daily.

Throughout Scripture we're reminded that it's not just about initial faith, it's about ongoing faith. This is what it means to **stand fast in the Lord**.

- **John 8:31**, *"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."*
- **Acts 14:21–22**, *"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.""*
- **Colossians 1:23**, *"if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which*

you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."

- **Hebrews 3:14**, *"For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,"*

Standing fast in the Lord means you're anchored down. You're not budging. It's to persist and keep one's standing. The person that stands fast in the Lord is the person walking in peace of the assurance of their salvation. This is not about working for your salvation, this is simply about remaining in your salvation. That salvation is through faith in Jesus alone, but it is to be a faith that continues to hold to Jesus.

Points to Ponder:

1. There's a real blessing and benefit that comes from the family of God – the Church. We need to be connected. It's not always about what you're going to gain from it, but what you can contribute to it. Sometimes just living out your faith is going to be a huge blessing to others, just as it was with Paul. Let's be ministers of God and fellow laborers of the gospel together.
2. Trials are going to come. Don't be surprised! We're appointed to this. This doesn't mean that God has abandoned you, or that you're being punished. This is the result of a world in opposition to God. Be thankful that even in these trials God is doing a work that is to your good.
3. Faith is key. **1 John 5:4**, *"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."* Keep living by faith and keep growing in your faith. Be steadfast and stand fast in the Lord.

*Hebrews 10:23-39