



“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord!”

What a glorious and precious truth...However, at the same time, what an impactful, heartfelt fact it is when we realize we have lost a loved one!

Humans want to know someone understands and cares.

Just as Christians want the presence of their family during trials, tribulations, and death of a loved one, so does the congregation want the pastor to be available for counsel during persecution and trying times within family...life in general!

Paul explains his absence from the Thessalonians.

1 Thess.2:17-20, “But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. ¹⁹ For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”

Here we have a heartfelt response from Paul to the Church at Thessalonica.

Some thoughts about this passage:

1. ***Paul knew that the Thessalonians appreciated the comfort he gave, but they wondered why he didn’t come and bring this comfort in person.*** Paul was assuring them that the reason was not a lack of love or desire for the church members.
2. ***Satan hindered us:*** It wasn’t that Paul did not *want* to visit the Thessalonians. It was that Satan hindered Paul and his associates. The Thessalonians were mostly Gentile converts, yet when Paul mentioned Satan here, he gave no further explanation. This shows that in the few weeks he was there, Paul taught the Thessalonians much about Satan and spiritual warfare.

3. Paul, in all his apostolic ministry and authority, could still be blocked by Satan.

Even so, Paul did not just receive this satanic hindrance in a fatalistic way. He did something about the hindrance.

- ✓ First, Paul had the discernment to know this was not just circumstance, but a satanic attack.
 - ✓ Second, Paul had faith. *“For a short time” means that Paul knew it would only be a short time until the roadblock was overcome.*
 - ✓ Third, Paul was committed to fight against the roadblock any way he could. If he couldn’t be there in person, his letter will go for him and teach and encourage them in his absence.
 - ✓ Finally, God brought the victory. In Acts, we find that Paul later ministered to various churches in Greece including Thessalonica.
- 4. For you are our hope, joy, and crown of rejoicing?** Paul assured the Thessalonians that he could never forget them because they were his glory and his **joy**. His inability to visit should never be taken as a lack of love towards the Thessalonians.

Paul was saying that he didn’t need a crown in heaven because these precious ones were his crown of victory.

Those whom we bring to Jesus and disciple are a crown of victory for us.

What is a pastor...to his congregants?

1 Thessalonians 3:1-10, “So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ² We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. ⁶ But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. ⁷ Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. ⁸ For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. ⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.”

In this passage there breathes the very essence of the spirit of the pastor.

1. **THERE IS AFFECTION.** We can never affect or win people unless we begin, quite simply, by liking them. It was Carlyle who said of London, "There are three and a half million people in this city--mostly fools!" The man who begins by despising men or by disliking them can never go on to save them.
2. **THERE IS ANXIETY.** When a man has put the best of himself into a project, he is anxious until he knows how the work of his hands and of his brain will weather the storms.
 - ***If that is true of things, it is still more poignantly true of people.***
 - ✓ **When a parent** has trained a child with love and sacrifice, he is anxious when that child is launched out on the difficulties and dangers of life in the world.
 - ✓ **When a teacher** has taught a child and put something of himself into that teaching, he is anxious to see how that training will stand the test of life.
 - ✓ **When a minister** has received a young person into the Church, after years of training in Sunday School and in Bible Class, he is anxious to know how he will fulfill the duties and the obligations of Church membership.
 - ✓ **Supremely it is so with Jesus Christ.** He staked so much on men and loved them with such a sacrificial love that he anxiously watches and waits to see how they will use that love.
3. **THERE IS HELP.** When Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica it was not nearly so much to inspect the Church there as it was to help it. It should be the desire and aim of every parent, every teacher and every preacher, not so much to criticize and condemn those in his charge for their faults and mistakes but to save them from these faults and mistakes. The Christian attitude should be to help restore...not condemn.
4. **THERE IS JOY.** Paul was glad that his converts were standing fast. He had the joy of one who had created something which would stand the tests of time. There is no joy like that of the parent who can point to a child who has done well.
5. **THERE IS PRAYER.** Paul carried his people on his heart to God's mercy seat. We will never know from how much sin we have been saved from and how much temptation we have conquered all because someone prayed for us. When we can serve people no other way, when, like Paul, we are unwillingly separated from them, there is one thing we can still do--we can pray for them.

ALL IS OF GOD

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, "Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

It is in a simple passage like this that we see Paul's mindset and heart. For Paul....Everything was of God.

- ✓ ***He prays to God to open a way for him whereby he may come to Thessalonica.*** It was to God that he turned for guidance in the ordinary day to day problems of life. One of the great mistakes of life is to turn to God only in the overpowering emergencies and the shattering crises.

A young man who went sailing quite often said to a pastor, "You know, when I am at home I hardly ever listen to the weather forecasts, but when I'm on that sailboat or getting ready to sail, I listen to those forecasts with all my ears."

It is quite possible to do without the weather forecasts when life is comfortably safe; it is essential to listen when life might depend on them.

We are apt to try to do the same with God. In ordinary things we disregard him, thinking that we can manage well enough by ourselves; in the emergency we clutch at him, knowing that we cannot get through without him.

He prays to God that he will enable the Thessalonians to fulfill the law of love in their daily lives. We often wonder why the Christian life is so difficult, especially in the ordinary everyday relationships. The answer may very well be that we are trying to live it by ourselves. The man who goes out in the morning without prayer is, in effect, saying, "I can quite well tackle today on my own."

Paul prays to God for the ultimate safety. At this time his mind was full of thoughts of the Second Coming of Christ when men would stand before the judgment seat of God. It was his prayer that God would so preserve his people in righteousness that on that day they would not be ashamed. The only way to prepare to meet God is to live daily with him.

NOTE: Some of today's lesson: Commentary by William Barclay, 1 & 2 Thessalonians.