A Successful Life of Service

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Introduction:

I. The Success of Paul’s Converts – 2:13-14

A. How They Accepted the Word – 2:13

1. In All its Divine Authenticity – 2:13a

“For this reason we also thank God ﻿﻿without ceasing, because when you ﻿﻿received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* ﻿﻿not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,”

Jesus is called the living Word. He is Divine, God, and He is human, man – the God-man -- A Divine/human person.

The Bible is the written Word. It is from God, (God-breathed) by the Holy Spirit. (II Tim. 3:16) It is recorded by men, as they were “borne along by the Holy Spirit.” (II Peter 1:19-20) It is a divine/human book --

* It is inspired - God-breathed, θεόπνευστος
* Verbal - every word /plenary – every part
* It is inerrant – without error in the original.

But they didn’t read it; they heard Paul teach it. He said things that were not in the O.T. (even if they had access to MMS.)

2. In All its Divine Achievement – 2:13b

“which also effectively ﻿﻿works in you who believe.”

B. How They Acted on the Word – 2:14

1. Whom they followed – 2:14a

“For you, brethren, became imitators ﻿﻿of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.”

Paul is not referring to their Christian life. He is referring to the consequences of their receiving the Gospel. The same things happened to them as happened to the Jews in Judea. They were persecuted by their countrymen.

2. What They Faced – 2:14b

“For ﻿﻿you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans,”

II. The Sin of Paul’s Countrymen – 2:15-16 -- evil

A. Their Provocation – 2:15a -- certainty

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“who killed both the Lord Jesus and ﻿﻿their own prophets, and have persecuted us;”

Some might point out that it was the Jews who insisted that Jesus be crucified. Matthew’s account chapter 26-29 will show that the Jews were responsible for His death.

“Their own prophets” could include to Isaiah, Jeremiah, or (see Luke 11:50-51) that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, ﻿﻿﻿from the blood of Abel to ﻿﻿the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

They killed many prophets! They persecuted Paul, at one time the greatest of the persecutors.

B. Their Presumption – 2:15b

“they do not please God”﻿﻿

God’s special, chosen people: spit in the face of Jesus, delighted in His suffering, demanded that Pilate seal the tomb, invented the lie to disprove His resurrection, rejected the Holy Spirit, murdered Stephen attempted to kill Paul- many times, put Paul in prison.

C. Their Perversity – 2:15c

﻿“contrary to all men,”

The nation was called by God to be His instrument to reach the world with His message. Instead of reaching out, they took His blessings as indications that they were better than the world and withdrew to themselves. That was the cue for the world to mistreat them. Being contrary to the world, they became contrary to God, Himself.

D. Their Prejudice – 2:16a

“forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always ﻿﻿to fill up *the measure of* their sins; God is long-suffering (patient) with man.”

He waited many centuries before sending the flood. He gave the Amorites 400 years to repent, (Gen.15.1 before He gave the land to Israel with instructions to kill all the inhabitants. In Israel’s case, He waited almost 40 years before He finally judged that generation in AD 70. Their measure was full at that time.

E. Their Punishment – 2:16b

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“but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.”

The wrath “has come” is a past tense. But it has not happened yet – at that time. He puts it in the past tense because of its certainty.

[This is like Romans 8:30, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also ﻿﻿called; whom He called, these He also ﻿﻿justified; and whom He justified, these He also ﻿﻿glorified.” You have not been glorified yet, but he puts it in the past tense because it certain to come to pass.]

Israel’s judgment had not come to pass at that point, but it was sure to happen. There is more judgment ahead for Israel. The nation will sign a seven-year peace treaty with the antichrist. Daniel 9:24-27. In the middle of the week he will break the covenant and take over Jerusalem and Judea. He will take over the rebuilt temple, defile it and launch a holocaust far greater than Hitler’s holocaust. All of this in included in the “tribulation” which is predicted for the nation.

III. The Sureness of Paul’s Crown – 2:17-20

A. Paul’s Earnest Desire – 2:17-18

1. His Great Hope – 2:17

“But brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time ﻿﻿in presence, not in heart, we endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.”

Paul left them before he wanted to go. He was separated in presence. That is, he was not there geographically. He was still there in heart. He thought about them, prayed for them and considered ways in which he could return to them.

2. His Great Hindrance – 2:18

“Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but ﻿﻿Satan hindered us.”

Satan hindered him. Some way Paul knew that it was Satan’s work. But that does not mean that Satan does all of the things he is accused of or given credit for. We do pretty well on our own.

James says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” {Note: He does not say that Satan does it}

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” (1:13-14) It seems that Paul had some inside information.

B. Paul’s Eternal Delight – 2:19-20

These two verses carry us to the Judgment set of Christ, where the believers’ works will be judged and rewards will be given. Or not given!

1. The Reward He Expected – 2:19a

“For ﻿﻿what *is* our hope, or joy, or ﻿﻿crown of rejoicing?”

Paul makes it clear that the reward is connected to our service from the time we believe until the time He calls us or comes for us.

I Cor. 3 and II Cor 5 are two extensive passages which describe the scene. A careful reading especially of I Cor.3 will show that not all works will pass the test. They are called wood, hay, stubble. Those that do pass are called gold, silver, precious stones.

Paul is emphasizing those whom he has won to the Lord and he sees them as his reward.

Hope - their development was what he lived for as a parent lives to see his children grow up to maturity, to produce and reproduce.

Joy - they filled his life with sunshine as he thought of what they used to be, what they had become, and what they would be by the grace of God.

Crown of rejoicing - They themselves were the symbol of God’s blessing on Paul’s life and ministry. We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

2. The Return He Expected – 2:19b

*“Is it* not even you in the ﻿﻿presence of our Lord Jesus Christ ﻿﻿at His coming?”

The Thessalonians will be a part of Paul’s reward. It will all occur at the coming, “παρουσίᾳ.” -- This is the term that is used of the Rapture of the church. There will be more about that in future chapters of these two epistles.

3. The Rejoicing He Expected – 2:20

“For you are our glory and joy.”

Conclusion:

A paraphrase from John Phillips:

What people rejoice over indicates their character and spiritual condition. Solomon and his father, David, are two cases in point. Solomon (in spite of his good start) rejoiced in the things this world: women, power and riches. He was a colossal failure in God’s eyes. Solomon loved things and used people. David (in spite of his mid-life failure) repented of his sin (esp. Psalm 51) and served God faithfully. David used things and loved people.”

Paul loved people. He lived for people. He spent his life winning people to Christ and discipling them in the faith. His glory and joy was to see people saved and established in the things of Christ. His ambition was to see them at last as crowns and trophies to lay at Jesus’ feet.

What is your glory and joy?