Facing Tribulation

I Thessalonians 3:1-13

Introduction:

In Acts 17 we learn that Paul had to leave Berea for Athens. Some brothers accompanied Paul to guarantee his safe arrival. Paul told these brothers to instruct Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens as soon as possible. They apparently did so. Paul then sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, leaving him and Silas “alone in Athens.” Soon after that He sent Silas to Berea. Then he was alone, all by himself.

Paul stayed in Athens, reasoned with the Jews and Gentile worshipers in the synagogue and then in the marketplace with the philosophers. Silas and Timothy returned to Athens and, not finding Paul there, went on, as previously planned, to Corinth. (Acts 18:5)

I. Paul’s Caution – 3:1-5

A. The Place – 3:1

“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,”

Because of having to leave his converts, and because he had himself (and Silas) been hindered from returning to the city, Paul could scarcely bear up under the silence and uncertainty of not knowing how the believers were doing. Therefore, he sent Timothy back to see how the young church was making out. So, the place was Athens

B. The Proposal – 3:2

1. The Messenger Chosen – 3:2a

“and sent ﻿﻿Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ,”

Why would he send this one? He was brother of Paul. He was Paul’s son in the faith. That also made him a brother. He was a minister of God.

The word minister is διάκονος (deacon) but not the office. He was a fellow laborer of the gospel. This special description of Timothy may have been necessary because of his age and inexperience.

2. The Messenger Charged – 3:2b

“to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,”

a. To Establish Them:

“to make them firm and solid in their faith.”

Faith can refer to:

* The doctrine we believe -- An Objective Faith

Jude 3

“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you ﻿﻿concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting ﻿﻿you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

* Our belief (trust) in that doctrine. -- Subjective Faith

The more the new believer knows about the doctrine (objective faith) the greater will be his trust (subjective faith) in the doctrine and in the God Who gave that doctrine. That is why Jesus instructed the apostles to teach as an important part of the discipling process. (Matt. 28:19-20)

b. To Encourage Them in the Faith.

The word for encourage is παρακαλέσαι. The Holy Spirit is called παράκλητον He is the One called alongside to help. Timothy is to come alongside and help them in their afflictions.

C. The Petition

1. Suffering Faced – 3:3

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

The desired result of Timothy’s ministry was that they should be strengthen to the point not that there should be no tribulations, but that they would not be shaken by them.

2. Suffering Foretold – 3:4

﻿“For, in fact, we told you (again and again) before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.”

I gave a fuller translation of the word “told.” The imperfect tense indicates that he told them again and again while he was there that they were going to suffer tribulation. Then he says, “it happened” even while Paul was still there. So they know that he was right.

D. The Plan – 3:5

1. The Anxiety Confessed – 3:5a﻿

“For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith,”

No news is not necessarily good news. Paul was concerned because he knew their situation first-hand. The enemies were dangerous people. Not knowing the latest was the worst part of all.

Was it right for Paul to be concern? This is not the first time. In 2 Cor. 2:12-13 Paul wrote:

*{Ray, Here I need a map of the area around the Aegean Sea.}*

“Furthermore, ﻿﻿when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ’s gospel, and ﻿﻿a ﻿﻿door was opened to me by the Lord, ﻿﻿﻿I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.”

Concern is proper when it leads to calling on the Lord for help and being available to be a part of that help.

1. The Adversary Confronted – 3:5b

﻿“lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and ﻿﻿our labor might be in vain.”

Paul’s concern was that they might not be able to meet the challenge of the enemy on their own. If they were defeated by the enemy then the labors of the missionary team would be in vain. So he sent Timothy to help.

II. Paul’s Consolation – 3:6-10

1. The Announcement Paul Received – 3:6

﻿“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--”

Timothy announced the good news. The Thessalonians faith and love are standing firm!

That is the best part. But they also have a good remembrance of the missionary team and they have as great a desire to see the team – as the team has to see them.

1. The Affection Paul Revealed – 3:7

“therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress ﻿﻿we were comforted concerning you by your faith.”

Affliction is a two-way street; so is comfort. When Paul wrote this letter, he was in Corinth. Read Acts 18 and you will find that the same there was the same resistance there as in Thessalonica. Paul was experiencing that as he wrote I and II Thessalonians.

C. The Achievement Paul Reviewed – 3:8-10

1. His Life Linked to Theirs – 3:8

“For now we live, if you ﻿﻿stand fast in the Lord.”

His converts were not just statistics! They were a large part of his life: He loved them and lived in them.

* Did someone lead them astray? Paul was outraged.
* Did someone attack them? Paul leaped to their defense
* Were they suffering persecution? Paul’s heart ached for them.

He wept with those who wept; He rejoiced with those who rejoiced; He wrote to them and kept in touch with them; the lists of names in his letters indicates that. We don’t have all of his letters – (4 to Corinth) Yes, he was linked very closely with them.

2. His Life Lived for Them – 3:9-10

1. His Praise to God for Them – 3:9

“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,”

We can rephrase Paul’s rhetorical question to read: “We cannot thank God enough for you because of all the joy you have brought to our hearts by your endurance in these trials”.

Note: Paul gave God the credit for their behavior, he did not take credit for it.

He commended them, but also recognized and acknowledged the hand of God at work in their lives.

b. His Prayers to God for them – 3:10

“night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face ﻿﻿and perfect what is lacking in your faith?”

The news from Timothy was very welcomed by Paul, but he did not cease his prayer and his desire to see them. His prayers continued night and day. Not all night and all day, but in the night and in the day. Paul discerned from Timothy’s report that there was still some lack in their faith. He will address some of these in chapters 4 and 5.

III. Paul’s Craving – 3:11-13

A. Paul and the King of His Life – 3:11

1. Whom he Saw – 3:11a

“Now may (the) God and our Father Himself, and (the) Lord of us, Jesus [Christ],”

The 2 persons of the God-head are distinguished by an article (the) with each one. He saw God in 2 persons. The verb (direct) (11b), however, is singular showing that the two are considered as One. He saw one God

1. What he Sought – 3:11b

“direct our way to you.”

Paul still wanted to see and help them. Paul wanted God, Father and Son to direct it all.

B. Paul and the Compensation of His Love – 3:12

“And may the Lord make you increase and ﻿﻿abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you,”

They already love each other, but Paul is making a strong request (Optative) of God that their love might increase and overflow even more. That figure of overflowing shows that love wells up from within the believer naturally. It is to flow not just to Christians in the church, but to all men everywhere.

C. Paul and the Coming of His Lord – 3:13

1. The Review of the Saints by the Lord – 3:13a

“so that He may establish ﻿﻿your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father.”

The word strengthen (stērizai), used by Paul in verse 2, describes Timothy’s strengthening of the Thessalonians in their faith. Paul did not pray that they would be sinless; that was impossible. He prayed that they would be blameless (2:10), that is, that after they sinned they would deal with it as God requires and so be free from any reasonable charge by their fellowmen. Before God they should be holy, separated to God in their hearts and habits. Paul longed that when Jesus Christ would return He would find them blameless before men and holy before God.

1. The Return of the Saints with the Lord – 3:13b

“at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” (holy ones)

The holy ones accompanying Christ at His coming are probably the souls of the saints who have departed this life and gone to be with Christ, whose bodies will be resurrected when He comes (4:16). That is, they are Christians rather than angels.