I Thessalonians 3:1-13

James Ard

The text that we will be looking at this morning is I Thessalonians 3:1-13. Charles Swindoll, in his introduction to this chapter had an interesting thing to say…he said that there is not a poem written nor a monument built to pain. Think about that – it's sort of obvious but he says "no one extols the power and the beauty of pain" and yet the 3rd chapter, as we call it, of I Thessalonians talks a lot about pain; it deals with pain and what that pain can either accomplish or keep you from accomplishing.

We often talk about pain and sorrow and distress as if it were an unusual part life but in reality from the very beginning God teaches us through example and through his scripture that it is a part of life…it is a part of life.

Several times during the ministry of Christ when he gathered his disciples around him he would say to them – you're going to have trouble and most of the time he said you're going to have trouble with brethren. They're going to drive you out of the synagogue or out of the church and they're going to beat you and they're going to chase you and you're going to be considered by them to be the scum of the earth…and he said that quite often. He reminded them of that fact even though we reject it.

Today in theology there is quite a bit of preaching done which says that if you become a Christian, Charles what's going to happen to you? **As you sow, so you shall reap*. So, give to me as much as you possibly can because the Lord's going to pay you tenfold. Nothing is going to happen to you; you're going to be rich, you're going to be

protected and that's what we love to hear and when that doesn't happen then we really have a problem.

Someone turn to Philippians Chapter 1:29 and someone else get II Corinthians 4:8-10 and someone get I Peter 4:12-14.

II Corinthians: **We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.**

This was written to the Corinthian church where Paul was when he wrote the Thessalonian letter and he said that he was distressed but he continued to carry on. An interesting thing in this statement here is he says we carry in our own body the marks of Jesus' suffering; we display in our suffering the body of Christ, the kind of life that Christ would have us go.

Philippians: **For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.**

Isn't that interesting? Read that first phrase…**for it has been granted to you…** It has been granted to you – what? I'm trying to make the point that suffering is a part of the life that you live for Christ not an exception to that and here Paul says as it was when God granted you the ability to believe, he also granted you the ability to suffer which is sort of strange in a way.

I Peter: **Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that**

you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

So all of these New Testament writers are talking about the difficulty that one would have following Christ! Now, suffering can produce a number of outcomes. The outcome that Job had on his suffering is though he slay me I will still follow him and believe in him but Job's wife when she had to deal with suffering her reaction from what we have been given is a little different. She says there's no need to continue – curse God and die. It's fatalistic! Now, I don't know if that's a true representation of how she felt but we do know that pain and sorrow does not always draw one closer to God.

The amazing example of that is Judas himself. Judas was distraught, upset, very sorrowful for what had transpired both in his own life and in the innocent life of Christ and Peter was the same way and yet the two men reacted differently to the trauma and the anxiety of the moment. One ended his life; the other continued with his life and so we don't always know what's going to be the outcome. You in your experiences and I in mine have seen people react differently to those kinds of experiences. Some forsake God and some cling to God and I think that the key is what Paul is telling us in this 3rd chapter of I Thessalonians. So we know that there is suffering.

Look what Paul writes to the Thessalonians; he isn't distressed, he isn't anxious concerning them for look at the first few sentences in the text that we have. He

said when I could no longer forbear, when I could no longer stand it, when I could no longer deal with the uncertainly of what was going on in your life (Thessalonians), when I was concerned, when I was disturbed. In one of the letters he made the statement that he was concerned about his preaching that it have the right results because he said "lest I have labored in vain". So there was something about Paul; we tend to make him more than he really is because he had a big ego as most preachers do. I mean that's one reason why they are good at what they do; they have an ego and Paul had an ego. Remember he said I don't want to preach the gospel where somebody else has preached; I want to go where it hasn't gone before, I don't want to build upon another man's foundation – what's that?

The other thing that he was concerned about was not only the conversion of the people but he wanted to make sure that there were results and good results so he said here when I could bear it no longer, when I could stand it no longer what did he do? **Sent Timothy*. Timothy had come with him from Troas over from Philippi down to Berea and then he came down to Athens and seemingly Timothy was still in Athens when Paul went on into Thessalonica and then he's going to be by himself when he goes on in to Corinth.

So he sent Timothy back to the Thessalonians in order to make sure – what? What was he concerned about? **…in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith…** Notice that! He sent Timothy back there not to resolve the problem and I think this is one thing we said before. There are certain things

we can do with other people's problems and even with our own and most of the time there is the inability to fix things and that's what we all like to do.

Let's just take Wendell; can you fix Wendell's problem. I've tried; you can't, he's determined to stay where he is no matter what. He's in the hospital; he's been in the hospital a couple of times so what is our responsibility to Wendell? Go and tell him what he should do??? **No, because you're wasting your time.* I've already done that. ☺ He comes; he's here… my point being why should we try to fix Wendell's problem? Our purpose is to encourage him and to support him and to love him. This is what we sometimes have difficulty with. We even avoid people because we cannot, as we say, I can't do anything about their problems and we don't go. We don't visit; we don't telephone because we don't know how to ***fix*** their problem.

And Paul dealt with the same thing. He could not fix the Thessalonian problem because they were in a hospital environment so he sent Timothy and said Timothy I want you to go and encourage them; I want you to go and strengthen them so that they could persevere in their persecution and that's all you can do. It's all they could do in that time and Paul was an Apostle; he had the power of God behind him and he couldn't change things. So he sent Timothy there in his anxiety …**to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials.** See, that's what he worried about; this was a young church.

They began to have persecutions even when Paul was there and so he was worried that they would be unsettled in their faith and wasn't that a possibility; isn't that a possibility with us? **You know quite well that we were destined for them. 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. 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 might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. It's interesting what we assign to God and we assign to God everything.

In Plano recently they almost had a Christmas tragedy; the electricity went out at the outlet mall. They couldn't process your plastic cards; they didn't have lights. A tree had fallen down on one of the transformers and the woman said it was an act of God which is most of what we do. But now Paul says that when troubles come to your life who is the culprit? Who was it that came into the presence of God and said give me Job and I'm going to see that he prospers beyond his wildest dreams; I'm going to see that his sons and daughters are successful, I'm to multiply his herds and his flocks, I'm just going to really test him…was that the way Satan worked? **God had blessed him** and what was Satan's tact? He took it all away and today if someone said Mr. Job's sheep have all been killed by lightning we would said it is an act of God…so be careful.

As Sarah and I like to say sometimes God gets credit for a lot of things he doesn't deserve to get credit for and that's one of them. **Laws of nature.* That's right. **It's the way he set things up; violate them and…* Well you don't even have to violate them sometimes; you could be out playing golf and get hit by… **You shouldn't have been there!* ☺ ☺ Now, you'll understand that B.J. is a non-golfer so you have to take his comments with a grain of salt. **Maybe more than one grain.* ☺

Tempted you lest our efforts might have been in vain… lest you be removed from your faith. But Timothy has now just come back to us and he has told us the wonderful news and there is great joy in Paul and he says not only have you endured but as music to anyone's ears, especially a preacher that used to preach there what did he say about them and himself. Timothy said that you still remember me with pleasant thoughts. Look at this: **you have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us just as we long to see you.** So Paul was remembered; they still liked him and liked what he did because he had brought to them the gospel.

How can I thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in your presence…night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. They were growing; they were growing in the faith, there was joy.

The last few sentences of this text is a prayer. It's an intriguing prayer for several reasons and I don't mean to be decisive in this or create problems but we think of prayer as a formula. I know you don't necessarily verbalize it all the time but a lot of times we think of prayer as a formula; in fact during the worship hour sometimes when someone is leading prayer either in the front or in the back and if they do not say things in a certain order it causes us to wonder. Am I the only one that does that or do the rest of you do the same thing because there is a formula. We have decided that it's only effective if you follow that formula.

I looked at this prayer of Paul's and it violates every formula that I've ever used but yet it's still a prayer because the formula says you say something to the Father

at the beginning and you say something about the Son at the end and if you get those reversed you throw us off and Paul did neither.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. Because Paul had said that he had been injured; he desired to come and could not. **May the Lord make your love increase…**Now, I want you to pay attention to what he is praying for and what he is **not** praying for: think about that. Now, think of the condition of the Thessalonians, what they are going through. They are a young church; they are a new church, they are a persecuted church, they have faith problems because we're going to talk about that in the 4th chapter …some disturbing things. **May our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for me to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else just as ours does for you. 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.**

Remember that we stated that every chapter ends with a reference to the coming. Now, what did he pray for? He didn't pray for their persecution to be taken away. Notice that! He prayed for their faith, for their love for one another and for others that they may be strengthened in heart and that they may be blameless and holy and he reminds them that Jesus is coming again.

That's a powerful prayer – it's short. Some have said it really wasn't a prayer; some have said it was just an affirmative statement made by Paul in his letter and some say it was a prayer. To me, I think it can be a prayer. Some of my prayers are pretty

short. **One thing that I noticed about this prayer; he's praying that they will love and care for one another but it says something about everyone else—do we do that; do we pray for those we know that are driving reckless out there on the freeway. We had a death on Dallas North Tollway this week where someone was driving recklessly killing an innocent man.* And that includes our enemies, doesn't it and those who persecute you and say evil things against you. I think it is hard for us because we tend to think of ourselves as ourselves rather than being what God would have us to be.

Look at Stephen; what were the last words on Stephen's lips when he did? **Lord, do not hold this sin against them.** My point is: we have little sympathy for people we hold responsible or our expectations of them are such and many people that we live with do not have the same values that we have or do not understand the things that we understand about God and Christ and right living and responsibility and I think this is what he was saying. He said I pray that your love will increase for yourselves and the body there and for others because that's the only way that we're going to be able to deal with the world in which we live in is with love and compassion…it's the only way. The only way that we're going to move people is with love and compassion; we cannot move them with truth spoken in an attempt to bring about a change. I wish it were that way but it's not.

So let's look at this text. Number one there was anxiety about the persecution of fellow Christians. Paul immediately sent someone to help them and the help that he brought was to strengthen them in their faith, in their love and to strengthen them in

their perseverance. There was joy in the body and with Paul when he found they had remained faithful under supreme persecutions.

The text ends with a prayer of thanksgiving to God and with requesting that God continue to help them to love each other. You know what Jesus said about the fulfillment of the law? The first he said is Thou shalt love the Lord they God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy strength and the second is like unto it – thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself and on these two laws or principles rest everything – the love of God and the love of people. Nothing else is more important than those things.

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This is a transcript of a class taught by James Ard at the Waterview Church of Christ.
**Indicates comments by class members.*
A blank indicates words/phrases that could not be understood.