**1 Thessalonians 3:1-5**

slide 1

**Paul’s Boat Develops a Leak**

***1*** ***Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, 3 so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.***

* Over the past several messages . . . on 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 . . . we’ve examined how Paul expresses his earnest desire to return to Thessalonica to be with his dear friends.
  + But because of the persecution of the Jews and the Gentiles in the region . . . incited by Satan . . . Paul had been unable to return.
* Nevertheless, despite being prevented from returning to them, in v. 19-20 Paul expresses his own confidence and a desire for the Thessalonians to **be confident that their perseverance in faith would result in their receiving crown rewards from the Lord *at His coming***.
* Now, in our passage this morning, Paul backtracks a little to explain **why he felt it necessary to send Timothy to them**.
  + In this passage Paul explains to the Thessalonian brethren that **since Satan had successfully prevented his own return to Thessalonica, the next best option was to send Timothy to them.**
* We should note that **this passage contains little new, in the way of doctrine.** It serves as **an explanation for why Paul felt it necessary to send Timothy at all.**

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**Two Purposes For Sending Timothy**

* In examining this passage, we can see that **Paul expresses 2 purposes for sending Timothy back to Thessalonica**.
  + The **first** purpose, stated in v. 1, is because of **Paul’s great personal concern for the wellbeing of the believers in Thessalonica**.
  + The **second** purpose, stated in v. 2, is because Paul wanted to ***strengthen and encourage* the Thessalonians in their faith**.

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**Paul’s First Motive— Personal Concern**

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***1 Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy***

* Paul begins this passage with the explanatory phrase, ***therefore when we could endure it no longer***.
  + In this phrase, we are given **insight into the intensity of** **Paul’s personal concern and affection** for the Thessalonian believers.
* The word Paul uses here that is translated ***endure*** . . . *stegō* . . . means “to withstand” or “to hold out against.”
  + The word *stegō* conveys the idea of **the hull of a water-tight vessel being able to withstand the pressure of the water pressing against it**. Once the hull of the ship begins to leak, the boat is no longer able to ***endure***, or “hold out against” the pressure of the water.
* This was the emotion Paul wanted to convey here in v. 1 . . . and why I entitled this week’s message **“Paul’s boat develops a leak.”**
  + Not knowing what was happening to the church in Thessalonica, **Paul could *no longer endure* the suspense** . . . the pressure of no knowing what was going on in Thessalonica had caused a “leak” in his mind . . . and he decided that he had to **do something to find out what was going on in Thessalonica**.
  + Had Satan been successful in robbing the Thessalonians of their lives or their faith? Or were they persevering in the face of mounting persecution? Paul could ***endure*** the suspense no longer.
* We have to imagine what it must have been like for Paul. In the time in which he lived communication was very slow. Depending on the distance, it would often take weeks . . . or even months . . . for a letter to reach its destination and for an answer to be received back.
  + Those of us over the age of 40 can remember what it was like before email, instant messaging and texting.
  + I talk with guys I fly with who were in the Navy and they tell me that during the course of their military careers they saw an incredible improvement in technology aboard ships.
  + In the old days mail was brought aboard the ship every few weeks. So it was common not to be able to send or receive a letter from home for weeks at a time.
  + Men whose wives were pregnant while they were at sea would have to wait for the mail . . . or if they were fortunate enough, for a telegram to announce the arrival of their child.
    - You can imagine what that must have been like!
  + But the Navy of today has gone from very limited and slow access to news and communication to immediate access to loved ones via Facetime, texting, instant messaging and email. Such modern communication enables sailors to be in immediate contact with their family back home.
    - Immediate contact doesn’t ease the stress of separation, but at least it helps relieve the lack of communication.
* For Paul, who had to wait weeks or months to hear any news of what was happening in Thessalonica . . . and knowing of the very real danger his friends were in . . . must have been agonizing.
  + And during that intervening time, a person’s imagination can come up with many “worst-case scenarios.” The suspense and anxiety could be overwhelming.

**Paul’s Solution—Send Timothy**

slide 4

***1 Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy***

* As a result of not knowing what was happening in Thessalonica, Paul states . . . ***Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy***.
  + As much as he wanted and needed Timothy and Silas with him, Paul knew that the churches in Macedonia needed them more.
  + He knew that he couldn’t go because he was still public enemy #1 in Macedonian. So, the next best option was to send Silas and Timothy in his place.
* From our previous study of the events surrounding Paul’s time in Thessalonica . . . in Acts chapter 17 . . . we learned that having been forced to flee Thessalonica by the Jews, and having then been pursued by the Jews into Berea, Paul was then forced to flee south to Athens.
  + We read of Paul’s departure from Berea in Acts 17:14-15 . . .

***Acts 17:14-15— 14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.***

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* + As we see, in v. 15, having arrived in Athens, Paul then instructs his Berean escorts to instruct Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens as soon as possible, which they do.
* But upon being reunited with Paul in Athens, and receiving the report from Silas and Timothy regarding the situation in Macedonia, Paul first learns of the dire situation and spiritual attacks the Thessalonians were under and then decides to send Timothy back to Thessalonica and to send Silas back into other cities in Macedonia . . . once again leaving Paul ***behind at Athens alone***.
* While we know, for a fact, that Timothy went to Thessalonica, we don’t know the exact destination or route of Silas.
  + But knowing the degree of persecution the other churches in Macedonia had come under, it is likely that Silas went to one of the other churches, such as the church in Philippi or the one in Berea.

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**Paul’s Second Motive— To Strengthen and Encourage**

***2 we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, 3 so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions***

* So, having **first** stated **his own personal concern** for the welfare of the Thessalonian church as a motive for sending Timothy back to them, **in v. 2-3 Paul states his second motive** for sending Timothy back to them . . . ***we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions.***
* In reading through these 5 verses it is difficult to discern which of Paul’s two motives was stronger . . . his personal concern for their well-being **or** his desire to strengthen and encourage them in their faith.
  + If I had to pick one over the other, I would say that **Paul’s overriding motive for sending Timothy back to Thessalonica was his fear for them . . .**  **that because he had to leave before their spiritual training was complete, that Satan would undo all that he had labored to accomplish.**
  + Paul says as much in v. 5. Using the same word he uses in v. 1 . . . *stegō* . . . Paul says, ***for this reason, when I could endure it no longer . . .* when the suspense and worry became too much . . .  *I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.***
* Here, in this passage we get a beautiful glimpse of Paul’s character.
  + When we think of the apostle Paul, the image that often comes to mind is of a brilliant, single-minded evangelist who sought to reach as many people with the gospel of Jesus Christ as he could.
  + Traveling from town to town, Paul would boldly and defiantly stand up to any person who sought to thwart his efforts. His love for Christ overrode concern for his own personal safety. He was willing to suffer for Christ and the cause of the gospel.
  + But while this picture is quite accurate, it neglects to acknowledge the fact that Paul was also a man who had a great personal love and affection for every member of the body of Christ.
  + Paul knew his converts by name and by their life’s stories. He knew them personally. Every single one of them was important and beloved by Paul. And to know that his friends were under great persecution was painful for Paul.
* But Paul was also worried for the new converts in Thessalonica for another reason. As D. Edmond Hiebert states, *“Paul was well aware that a spectacular conversion was not enough. The converts also needed to be established and grounded in their faith.”*
* So, having been overcome with worry for the churches in Macedonia, Paul dispatches Timothy back to Thessalonica and Silas to an unspecified city.
  + And as we read in v. 2, Timothy’s mission is to ***strengthen and encourage* the brethren in their faith so that they would not be *disturbed by their afflictions***.
* Here in v. 2 Paul uses a very good word to describe the reason for his concern.

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* + In the phrase, ***disturbed by their afflictions***, the word ***disturbed*** . . . *sainō* . . . means “to be agitated, troubled or **moved**.”
  + The word *sainō* describes the movement of a dog’s tail when wagged, moving back and forth.
  + Such a “back and forth” motion describes a person who is not firmly established in his or her beliefs. As a result of not being grounded, an immature believer can more easily be **deceived** and persuaded of false doctrine.
  + In his later letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to grow to maturity, stating that . . .

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***Ephesians 4:4— As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;***

* The only solution to being susceptible to false teaching is to be mature and well-grounded in one’s faith. Only those believers who have spiritual discernment, they are able to detect ***the trickery of men* and the *craftiness* and *deceitful scheming*** **of the devil.**
  + **This was Timothy’s mission, as he returned to Thessalonica . . . to teach the new believers in Thessalonica so that they would not be tricked or deceived by false teaching.**

**Trials and Affliction—Our Christian “destiny”**

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***v. 3—so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.***

* Then, having explained that he was sending Timothy to them to strengthen and encourage them in their afflictions, Paul then adds an important reminder to his reader at the end of v. 3 . . . ***for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.***
* Here in this statement Paul makes a point that we must constantly be mindful of as we live our daily lives . . . **despite the fact that we are God’s children and that He intends what is best for us, it is God’s will that we suffer trials and affliction. God has appointed, or *destined*, each of us to suffer in various ways.**

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* Paul uses the term ***destiny*** . . . the Greek word *keimai* . . . deliberately here in v. 3. The word means “appointed” or “destined” and is very descriptive of God’s sovereign will.
* In considering Paul’s use of the word ***destined*** here in v. 3, we should find this to be a comfort and encouragement.
  + The reality, as Paul states here in v. 3, is that it **is** our **God-appointed** **“destiny”** to suffer trials and affliction. But when you consider that it is God who has ordained our trials, we should find that comforting.
  + For as much as we all desire to avoid suffering and affliction, **knowing that God has ordained our trials is much more encouraging and comforting than the alternative . . . that God is unable to prevent us from suffering . . . that Satan or evil men are able to afflict and persecute us without restraint.**
  + The knowledge that God is in control of all things is much more comforting than the alternative . . . that God is not in control and we are at the mercy of random events.
* The reason Paul tells the Thessalonians that they have ***been destined for* suffering and affliction** is because Paul feared that some might be drawn away from Christ by the friendly words of non-Christians who sought to induce them to give up Christ in order to escape persecution.
  + As we all know, it is our natural inclination to escape painful or unpleasant situations or to avoid those situations in the first place.

* + - In fact, taking advantage of man’s aversion to pain and suffering it is one of Satan’s most effective strategies.
    - As one theologian puts it . . . **“the devil of often more to be feared when he fawns than when he roars.”**
* So, knowing this human aversion to pain and suffering, Paul sends Timothy to strengthen and encourage them to stand firm in their faith.

**The example of Paul’s own affliction**

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***v. 4— for indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.***

* Then, to drive home the point that they were not the only Christians who were suffering and being persecuted, in v. 4 Paul reminds them of his own suffering . . . ***for indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.***
* Remember, Paul and Silas had arrived in Thessalonica with terrible and raw wounds on their backs from having been unjustly accused and flogged in Philippi.
  + Every Thessalonian believer knew that Paul had already suffered greatly for the name of Christ. And as we learn here in v. 4, Paul had warned them that if they followed Christ, they would also be called upon to ***suffer affliction*** in various ways.
  + Note in v. 4 that Paul’s warning of coming suffering was not a single warning. In fact, Paul’s warning of coming trials and affliction were an important part of his gospel message.
    - Paul says ***we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction.***
    - Paul’s use of the plural pronoun, ***we***, here in v. 4 is not merely a reference to himself, Silas and Timothy . . . the use of the plural ***we*** is a warning to **all Christians that we all will suffer affliction as followers of Christ.**

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**The disservice of an incomplete gospel message**

***1 Thessalonians 3:3-4— 3 so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.***

* Paul makes an important point here in this passage that we should all keep in mind when we have opportunities to present the gospel message.
  + The important point that Paul makes here is that **there is the possibility . . . even the likelihood . . . that adverse personal consequences will result from accepting and believing the gospel message**.
  + And furthermore, **if we don’t warn converts in advance that their faith will result in spiritual attacks upon them,** **we are doing them a serious injustice.**
* So many Christians make the terrible mistake of only telling unbelievers that **“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Sound good? Would you like that?**
  + The problem is that while God does love us and He does have a wonderful plan for our lives, **part of God’s wonderful plan for our lives is that we suffer persecution, trials and affliction** during our time here on the earth.
  + Part of God’s wonderful plan for our lives is that unbelievers . . . including friends and family members . . . will become estranged from us. They will resent us and even hate us because of Christ.
* The presentation of the gospel must begin with instruction that all mankind is sinful and depraved and hopelessly destined to eternal judgment.
  + It is only when a person understands and believes the “bad news” that he or she is a sinner in need of a Savior that that person is ready to hear the “good news” that God has provided the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.
* And if, after hearing and believing the “bad news” and the “good news,” a person professes faith in Jesus Christ, **you must be honest with this new convert and tell him or her that with the joy of salvation also comes the purifying fire of sanctification . . . that the change that begins with our regeneration will continue in the fiery trials of persecution and affliction.**
  + But rather than thinking . . . wrongly . . . that Satan is the cause of these trials, we must teach new converts that our trials are ordained by God**.**
  + Yes, Satan and his demons may afflict us on occasion, but those events only occur by divine permission. Satan can do nothing without God’s permission.
  + And furthermore, our trials and afflictions are not ordained for us as punishment, but for cleansing and sanctifying us . . . fitting us for heaven.
  + As Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 4:15-18, regarding our earthly suffering . . .

***2 Corinthians 4:15-18— 15 For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.***

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* + Nobody enjoys or even welcomes suffering. But Paul exhorts us to see the eternal picture . . . that the suffering we endure during our brief earthly lives is but ***momentary, light affliction*** compared to the ***eternal glory*** we will ultimately enjoy in heaven . . . an ***eternal glory*** that is ***far beyond all comparison***.
  + And furthermore, we must understand and embrace the fact that **what we endure in the form of suffering and affliction is . . . as Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 4:16 . . . for the purpose of our *giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God***.
  + While we may suffer trials and affliction, God is using it **to sanctify us** **and to glorify Himself.**

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**Paul’s consistent message—All Christians will suffer**

***1 Thessalonians 3:4— For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.***

* It is with these things in mind that we can understand why the apostle Paul placed such an emphasis on teaching the reality of persecution and suffering to all the new converts he made during his years of ministry.
  + As he states here in v. 4, ***for indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.***
  + Paul’s warning of coming suffering and affliction was an important part of his gospel message.
* And while we should not lead off with this message of Christian suffering in our gospel presentations, we do a terrible disservice and injustice to those who believe in Jesus Christ if we fail to include this important message as part of the entire gospel presentation.

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**“How will I suffer?”**

* When we talk about Christian trials and suffering, one of the first questions we want to ask is, “how will I suffer?” “What sort of trials am I destined to suffer?”
  + This question is inevitable. We all want to know what our future holds. But, fortunately, God does reveal these things in advance. We deal with them as the situations present themselves. But one thing we can know for sure . . . no two Christians suffer or are afflicted in the same way.
  + Again, we have to remember that our suffering and affliction is ordained for a good and constructive purpose. God uses the fiery trials in our lives to remove the impurities from our faith. The trials we endure make our faith stronger and our dependence and love of God even more determined.

***1 Thessalonians 3:5— For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.***

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* Yet, despite the fact that Paul had faithfully prepared the Thessalonians by teaching them that they would suffer for Christ, that did not stop Paul from reacting to the unknown with great anxiety, as we read in v. 5 . . . ***for this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.***
* Having prepared the Thessalonians as best he could . . . and knowing that God was sovereign over all things . . . that still did not stop Paul from worrying about his friends.
* Here in v. 5 Paul also reminds us of another very important reality . . . not everyone who professes faith is truly saved.
  + As we read in the parable of the sower, in Matthew 13:3-9 . . .

***Matthew 13:3-9— 3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."***

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* + In this parable we see that three of the four seeds the Lord speaks of actually begin to grow . . . meaning that three of the seeds demonstrate a degree of faith.
  + But of the three seeds that begin to grow and demonstrate faith, **two of the three seeds die off, meaning they demonstrated faith for a time, but ultimately show that while they appeared to believe, their faith was not a true, abiding faith.**
    - **Only one of the three seeds ultimately grows to maturity.**
  + The lesson from this parable is that it is possible for a person to **appear** to have true faith, even for a very long time, and yet fall away in unbelief. It is possible for a person who appears to have faith to not have true, saving faith.
* There are many tragic stories of men and women whose lives appear to be those of true believers. But at some point these professed Christians turn away from God and renounce their faith. **Why?**
  + **Because they were never saved to begin with**. While to all the world they appeared to be true believers, time and events eventually worked to reveal them not to be saved.
* That is what Paul is fearful of in 1 Thessalonians 3:5. Paul feared that when he learned of what ultimately happened to the Thessalonians, that some . . . or all . . . of the professing Christians will have succumbed to the suffering and persecution and turned away from Christ, meaning that his tireless efforts on their behalf had been in vain.

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* Here in our passage this morning we are given insight into the character of the apostle Paul.
  + Despite the fact that he visited hundreds of towns and villages and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to tens of thousands and saw thousands saved, Paul saw every redeemed soul as a precious brother or sister. And because he knew that they would suffer for the name of Christ, Paul carried a great burden of worry for their safety and spiritual growth, which he expresses in this passage.