**1 Thessalonians 3:6-10**

slide 1

**The Effect of Timothy’s Report on Paul**

***6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, 7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. 9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?***

* In the second part this letter to the Thessalonians, which begins in 1 Thessalonians 2:1, Paul has been recounting the events surrounding his ministry in Thessalonica.
  + He begins in 2:1-8 by making a defense of himself from the accusations of his enemies that he had used the Thessalonians to enrich himself.
    - In refuting this accusation, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he and Silas had come to them after having been flogged in Philippi and sought nothing from them, except the opportunity to preach Christ to them.
    - Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he and his ministry team had treated them as spiritual children, nurturing them as a nursing mother.
  + In 2:9-16 Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he and his missionary brethren had exhorted and encouraged them, even in the face of the mounting opposition from the jealous Jews in the city.
  + In 2:17-20 Paul then expresses his overwhelming desire to return to Thessalonica, but was being actively opposed and hindered by Satan.
  + In 3:1-5, which we examined last week, Paul explains that because he was overcome with concern for their safety and their faith, he decided to send Timothy back to minister to them.
* So, from 2:1 to 3:5 we have an historical record of Paul’s relationship to the Thessalonians to the point that Paul had decided to send Timothy back to them.
  + **Now, in the closing verses of chapter 3 Paul completes his recounting of the events in regard to his personal affection for and his ministry to the Thessalonians.**

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**The Report of Timothy’s return**

***6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,***

* Now, moving from the historical to the present, Paul begins by stating in v. 6 . . . ***6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you . . .***
* In the opening phrase the English translation loses some of the urgency conveyed in Paul’s statement. In the Greek, the opening phrase literally means ***but just now Timothy has come to us from you***.
  + The Greek word *arti* literally means “just now” or “at this moment.” Paul’s use of this term indicates that this letter was an immediate response to the things that Timothy had reported to him.
* Having been worried sick about the condition of things with his friends in Thessalonica, Paul receives Timothy’s report and feels compelled to immediately write to them.
  + And despite the fact that Paul has to defend himself . . . or at acknowledge . . . the false accusations of his enemies, Paul’s overriding purpose in writing this letter is to express his personal gratitude and relief for Timothy’s report. As Paul writes, ***but just now Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,***
* Not only does Paul . . . probably with great relief . . . learn the ***good news of their faith and love***, but he is also overjoyed to learn that his love and for concern for the Thessalonian brethren is reciprocated . . . ***that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you***.

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* Here in v. 6 Paul is grateful to learn that ***you always think kindly of us, longing to see us***.
  + In the phrase ***longing to see***, the Greek word for ***longing*** . . . *epipotheō* . . . means “to long for, with great affection.” This term was one that denotes “a tender yearning toward an absent beloved.”
  + The use of this term indicates that Paul was not merely a spiritual father and good friend, he was a greatly beloved brother.
* And not only were the Thessalonians ***longing to see*** Paul, but Paul’s feeling toward them was the same, as he states that ***we also long to see you***.
  + This statement embodies true Christian love and fellowship. There was a true God-focused self-sacrificing love between Paul and the saints in Thessalonica.
* So, with Timothy’s report Paul has the best possible news . . .
  + **Of foremost importance . . . and relief . . .** in Paul’s mind was the fact that the Thessalonian brethren were **not merely surviving** their persecution and affliction, **they were a thriving and growing church**.
  + **But, additionally, and on a very personal note**, the Thessalonians had not bought into the false accusations of Paul’s enemies, **but were, in fact, longing to see Paul and be with him as much as Paul was longing to return to them to see them and renew their friendship.**
* In reading this verse you can sense the relief and joy in Paul as he recounts Timothy’s report upon his arrival. For Paul, who had probably waited months for Timothy to return after leaving him in Athens, the moment of Timothy’s return with this report must have been a great weight lifted from his shoulders.
* To get a sense of the weight of worry that Paul was carrying, look at Acts 18:1-5.

***Acts 18:1-5— 1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, 3 and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. 4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. 5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.***

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* + Having dispatched Silas and Timothy back to Macedonia, Paul preached for a time in Athens before moving . . . alone . . . southward to Corinth, where he meets and becomes friends with Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, who had been forced to leave Rome with the ejection of the Jews by Emperor Claudius.
  + As was his practice, Paul preached in the Jewish synagogue in Corinth for a while, trying to ***persuade the Jews and Greeks***.
  + **But notice v. 5.** It is not until ***Silas and Timothy* returned *from Macedonia*** that ***Paul***, once again, ***began devoting himself completely to the word***.
  + With this statement in v. 5 you get a strong sense that Paul was suffering from the absence of Silas and Timothy and the strain of not knowing what was happening in Macedonia.
  + It is only with the return of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, and the great relief of their positive reports, that Paul is reinvigorated and, once again, plunges whole-heartedly into evangelizing the Corinthians.
* So, here in 1 Thessalonians chapters 2-3 and Acts chapters 17-18 we are able to get a better picture of the personality of the apostle Paul.
  + We can see that while he was a great champion of faith, he suffered from the strain and stress of emotions that we all suffer from. He worried to the point that it affected his efforts in ministry. His concern for the Thessalonians and the absence of his faithful companions, Silas and Timothy, caused him to become despondent and withdrawn.
  + It was only after Timothy’s return with his report that his friends in Thessalonica were flourishing that Paul then experienced great joy and relief and was, once again, energized to resume his ministry.

**The Reaction To Timothy’s Good News**

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***7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;***

* So, with Timothy’s report that the Thessalonian brethren ***longed*** to see him as much as he ***longed to see*** them, Paul then states in v. 7 . . . ***for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith***.
  + Here, in this statement Paul is, **in effect, saying** that **“all of the mental distress and physical affliction that we endure has been alleviated by the wonderful news that you are persevering and thriving in your faith.”**
    - Like a mother who has endured the pain of childbirth. Once the baby has safely arrived, the pain of birthing the child is quickly replaced by the joy and comfort of holding the precious child.
  + For Paul, who probably never knew a day in which he was not persecuted for the name of Christ, the news of the Thessalonians thriving in their faith greatly strengthened and encouraged him to press on in his spiritual battle.
* While it is easy to read this passage and move on to the next, stop and think about the profound impact that this report from Timothy had on Paul.
  + As we read in Acts 18:1-5, for a time Paul seemed to slow down a bit . . . his zeal for ministry was dampened by his concern and fear for his friends in Thessalonica.
  + But with the news that Timothy brought from Thessalonica, Paul was recharged and reinvigorated. **At a time when he was under great stress and worry, God gave Paul a wonderful gift of encouragement.**
  + When Paul was weighed down with worries, at just the right time God gave Paul a wonderful gift to spur him on.
  + **Isn’t that just like God . . . to give us exactly what we need, exactly when we need it?**

**The Result of Timothy’s Good News**

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***8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.***

* Then, to emphasize just what a profound effect Timothy’s news had on him, in v. 8 Paul adds . . . ***for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.***
  + Here in v. 8 the conditional word, ***if***, is a **first class conditional statement**, **having the weight of a certainty and could correctly be replaced by the word “since.”**
  + In other words, Paul is saying, ***for now we really live since you stand firm in the Lord***.
* With this statement Paul is reiterating just what a profound effect Timothy’s good news had on his frame of mind.
  + Because of the stress and worry over the Thessalonians, Paul was not **“lovin’ life”** during those months of uncertainty. For Paul, life had become a burden and he lived with a sense of dread hanging over him.
    - Michael Sadler, a 19th century scholar, states that *“the success of the cause of Christ, that is, the winning of souls to Him, and the continuance of such souls in Him, was Paul’s very life.”*
    - In fact, D. Edmond Hiebert states that the strain and sense of dread Paul felt in regard to the health and faith of the Thessalonian church was so powerful that *“had the Thessalonians apostatized, it would have been a veritable deathblow to Paul.”*

* + But with the great news that Timothy brought to him, Paul says, **‘now we can really live’ . . . ‘now, with this giant burden lifted from my shoulders, I can, once again, live and enjoy life, strengthened and encouraged in the knowledge that you are standing firm in the Lord!’**

**Paul’s Expression of Personal Gratitude**

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***9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account***

* Then, having stated what a relief to his soul the news of their continued faith was to him, in v. 9 Paul expresses, in very personal language, the degree of his personal gratitude to God for the gift of good news. Paul writes,***for what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account***.
* Here, in this rhetorical question Paul asks, **what could we possibly say or do to repay God for the joy and blessing of knowing that you were persevering in your faith? What could we possibly say or do that could convey the great gratitude we have for God’s protection of you and His encouragement of us?**
  + **The answer, obviously, is . . . nothing.** There is nothing we could ever say or do to repay God for what He does or gives us. That is the nature of grace. He gives us what we don’t deserve and could never merit, because it pleases Him to do so.
  + And all we can do in response is offer humble thanks and praise.
  + That is the attitude that Paul is conveying here in v. 9 . . . **I can never repay God for the relief and joy I am now feeling as I rejoice in the knowledge that you are firmly established in your faith . . . as I have been praying you would be.**

**Paul’s Goal To Return**

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***10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?***

* Then, having expressed that he could never render sufficient thanks to God for the joy he felt over the news of their abiding faith, in v. 10 Paul concludes this passage by voicing the fact that he had been ***praying most earnestly*** for his Thessalonian brethren . . . ***as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith.***
* Paul’s use of the term ***most earnestly*** is significant because it is found only in this letter.
  + The Greek term that Paul uses here . . . *huperekperissou* . . . is a compound word that means **“super abundantly.”** The Greek word is **descriptive of a raging river that has flooded out beyond its banks.”**
  + This same Greek word is only found one other place in the New Testament . . . used by Paul later in this same letter, 1 Thessalonians 5:13, in his final instructions to them. In his final instructions, Paul writes to them regarding the “overflowing” love they are to have for their shepherds . . .

***1 Thessalonians 5:13— and that you esteem them very highly . . .* overflowing in abundance of *. . . love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.***

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* As I read the definition of this Greek term I was reminded that such superlative statements . . . both negative and positive . . . can be found throughout Scripture as the men who received and wrote God’s word used superlative statements to express the great emotions they experienced.
  + On the positive side, we have Paul’s statement here in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 . . . ***we night and day keep praying most earnestly* . . . with an overflowing abundance of prayer . . .  *that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith***.
  + But we also find such superlative statements **with negative implications** in Scripture. For example, in Psalm 6 David uses the language of a truly humbled heart that is suffering under great affliction, resulting in a broken and contrite spirit. We read in Psalm 6:1-7 we can hear David’s groaning under the weight of his sin and his affliction . . .

***Psalm 6— 1 A Psalm of David.***

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***O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,***

***Nor chasten me in Your wrath.***

***2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am pining away;***

***Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are dismayed.***

***3 And my soul is greatly dismayed;***

***But You, O LORD—how long?***

***4 Return, O LORD, rescue my soul;***

***Save me because of Your lovingkindness.***

***5 For there is no mention of You in death;***

***In Sheol who will give You thanks?***

***6 I am weary with my sighing;***

***Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears.***

***7 My eye has wasted away with grief;***

***It has become old because of all my adversaries***

* + Do you hear the words of grief and pain? In those words of David you can hear his despair and misery. His sin against God and his loss of fellowship with the Lord has resulted in his divine chastisement as God allows David’s adversaries to persecute him. You hear David’s despair . . . and it is almost more than his soul can bear.

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* Here in our passage today, Paul uses the very descriptive language of “overflowing abundance” to describe **his prayers on behalf of the Thessalonian brethren.**
  + In describing how Paul ***night and day kept praying most earnestly***, he is expressing the “overflowing abundance” of his affection and concern for the Thessalonians.
* The phrase ***night and day*** does **not** imply that Paul continuously prayed ***night and day***, but that he prayed to God **both *night and day***.
  + - In other words, whenever Paul prayed . . . whether **night or day** . . . Paul prayed ***most earnestly*** . . . with overflowing love and concern . . . for his dear friends in Thessalonica.
* And the two specific things that Paul prayed for, with overflowing love, is stated in v. 10, was . . . ***that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith***.
  + As he previously stated in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, Paul’s overwhelming desire was that he be able, once again, to see his dear friends **“face to face.”**
  + While it was a great relief for him to know that they were flourishing, it was still Paul’s great desire to be with them in person, to enjoy renewing their friendship and to enjoy the fellowship and encouragement that he had once enjoyed with them.
* Secondly, in regard to his desire to ***complete what is lacking in your faith***, we know from 3:2 that Timothy had specifically been sent back to them ***to strengthen and encourage* them *as to* their *faith***.
  + As we will see in the next chapter, there still remained some significant points of doctrine that the Thessalonians needed to be instructed on to clear up some misconceptions.
  + Here in the expression of his continued prayers on their behalf we see that Paul regards his ministry and instruction in Thessalonica to still be incomplete. Therefore, in order to bring to completion that which he began during his initial visit to the city, Paul prays that God will permit him to return to Thessalonica to complete his work.
* We don’t know if Paul ever succeeded in returning to Thessalonica, but it seems likely, considering the fact that this church and the church in Philippi were the two churches Paul loved more than any others.

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**This passage reveals valuable insights into the travails of ministry**

* As I mentioned earlier, this passage provides us with some valuable insight into the character of the apostle Paul, as he reveals some of the emotions and troubles that resulted from this episode.
  + Paul experienced many of the emotions that we encounter in similar situations . . . fear, heart-ache, anxiety, discouragement, helplessness.
* But this passage also provides an important perspective for those who are engaged in ministry.
  + One of the most difficult aspects of being involved in ministry is the problem of **discouragement.**
  + I don’t know what it is about people that makes them think that it is helpful or a good idea to come up to a pastor or an elder and tell them, **“I don’t like the way you’re doing . . . .”**
  + Far too many times I have had people come up to me and tell me that they disapproved of some decision that had been made or they disapproved of something that I had said. Mind you, there is no accusation of sin . . . merely a voicing of that person’s personal displeasure or disapproval of something I had done.
  + Instead of engaging in polite and cordial conversation to understand why something was done or said, some people will just come up to you and . . . in absolute terms . . . say, “I don’t like what you did,” without finding out if there might be a reasonable explanation for why something they disapproved of had been done.
  + To me, there is nothing more discouraging than laboring hard to serve God and the flock of God, only to be told by someone that I’d failed miserably. You ought to try it sometime. It’s quite an experience . . . and one that is sure to discourage you.
* I will tell you that in my 15 years of service in the church as a deacon, elder and pastor, some of my most discouraging moments have come from people who have felt free to come up to me and tell me what a bad job I was doing and how I had let them down or disappointed them on some point of personal preference.
* The apostle Paul experienced such discouragement in places such as Corinth, in which his patience was tested to the maximum by a very worldly church. But one place Paul did not experience such discouragement was during his time with the new believers in Thessalonica. Quite the contrary. The Thessalonians were a faithful congregation that blessed and encouraged Paul greatly.
  + And it was because they were such a blessing to him that Paul grieved the loss of their fellowship by the persecution and affliction of Satan.
  + Paul’s concern for the Thessalonians was so great that his ministry efforts were adversely affected. He was so worried for them that his ministry efforts in Corinth were initially diminished to only a shadow of what they had previously been.
  + It was not until Timothy arrived with his glowing report of the situation in Thessalonica that Paul’s spirit was lifted and he, once again, engaged in joyous service to the Lord.
* With this passage and the Acts 18 passage I read earlier, we are given a glimpse into some of the difficulties that Paul encountered during his years of ministry.
  + Heartache and discouragement are an ever-present danger to men who labor in service to the Lord because we are imperfect men laboring to serve and lead imperfect and sinful people.
  + It is a very appropriate description of Christians as being like sheep. Christians, like sheep, are stinky and stupid . . . and they can bite.