

Week 12 | “Stay The Course”

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. **1st Thessalonians 3:1-5**
- B. It seems that a large portion of God’s family have been raised on a Gospel that if we have enough faith we will be healed. If we have enough passion, things will go well for us. If we read, pray, and fast occasionally, God will send prosperity our way, and our life of comfort will be bolstered and propped up BY WAY OF OUR great passion for Jesus.
- C. This Gospel that so many of us have been raised on, this Western Gospel, an American dream Gospel, this Gospel that’s more patriotic than it is prophetic, that’s more political than it is priestly, this Gospel that’s more temporal, than eternal empowers us to live in the here and now, to the exclusion of the then and there, of tomorrow.
- D. This Gospel, this Western Gospel has not served us well today, and it will leave us decimated under the pressure that’s awaiting us in the days, months and years ahead. The Gospel of the Kingdom that the Bible presents, that Paul is here presenting has a very different message.
- E. It’s not a message being shared only with MATURE believers, not just those that can handle it, but to NEW CONVERTS, to brand new, three-week old disciples of Jesus.
- F. After being driven out of Thessalonica, and Berea, Paul and the apostolic team while in Athens decide that the best thing they can do is send Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how this newly planted Church is faring. Paul has 3 primary things he wants Timothy to do in Thessalonica;
1. To strengthen and encourage the Church, making sure they were actually becoming disciples of Jesus.
 2. To make sure they weren’t thrown off track from the suffering they were all experiencing.
 3. To make sure that satan hadn’t deceived them and thrown them off course.
- G. What is your mindset regarding trouble, hardship, and trials in life? How do you approach them? Are you able to find God in the middle of the storms of your life?

II. THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH CONTINUING IN FAITH (1ST THESSALONIANS 3:1-3)

1. **1st Thessalonians 3:1-3** “Therefore when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left alone in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith

B. For Paul, there was never a good time to send Timothy away from him. This would mean leaving him alone, in a city like Athens, the home of Plato, Aristotle and pagan idolatry. It’s not an easy city to do ministry in, let alone doing it without his right arm, his right-hand Timothy.

C. We Thought It Good To Be Left Alone In Athens, and Sent Timothy—This word alone *speaks of a man leaving his father and mother, to cleave solely to his wife, or often of people who were dying, like they were left alone to die. It speaks of desolation.*

1. Paul is choosing to deal with serious isolation in a tough city, a city given over to idolatry because he can no longer endure the suspense of wondering how his beloved Children are doing in Thessalonica.
- D. And Sent Timothy Our Brother and Minister of God, and Our Fellow Laborer In the Gospel of Christ— Because Paul is unable to return to Thessalonica, it makes the most sense to send Timothy back on Paul's behalf. This was a huge statement of Paul's love for them.
1. It's clear that lots of people want to be Timothy, to be someone fathered by Paul, to be a sent son. But being fathered by Paul, being trained as a Timothy, and being sent as a son comes at a painful price.
 2. If you remember, in **Acts 16**, Paul has Timothy circumcised, not because it was lawful, but because it would help Timothy's ministry among the Jews.
 3. Timothy's trust Paul's even when they can't see it clearly themselves. They lean into the wisdom of God in the lives of others whom God has placed in their lives.
 - a. Who's your Paul? Who do you listen to? Who are the human leaders that you submit your life to? Who speaks into your life? Who encourages you and the dreams that God has given to you?
 4. Paul is making a daring assertion about Timothy's quality and giftedness by saying that he's God's minister, God's worker, God's servant and God's son first, and then a co-worker alongside Paul.
 5. Paul's making clear, Timothy isn't just a postman, he's an apostolic leader who's coming not just with Paul's authority, but also with Christ's authority.
- E. To Establish You and Encourage You Concerning Your Faith—No matter how great their salvation experience was, it's clear that they needed to continue walking with the Lord. They needed to be shown the way of God more clearly.
1. It didn't matter how much Paul, this great apostolic leader poured into them during this short period of time, they needed more help, more discipleship, more time with teachers, and more time growing in Christ.
 2. Beloved, your faith in Christ isn't static. Meaning it's never just idle. It's growing closer in Christ, or moving away, but it's never just "there."
 - a. What does your continued growth in Christ look like? Are you practicing what you're learning? Are you putting to work, what God is working in you?

III. DON'T GET THROWN OFF TRACK (1ST THESSALONIANS 3:3-4)

1. **1st Thessalonians 3:3-4** "... that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know."
- B. That No One Should Be Shaken By These Afflictions; For You Yourself Know That We Are Appointed To This— Paul's concerned that these new followers of Jesus might be shaken/smooth talked out of the pressure they were in.

1. Paul's saying, "*Timothy, when you get there, make sure that they aren't listening to the smooth talk of their fellow countrymen, who are encouraging them to return to Judaism and then their problems will cease. It's deception. Tell them to stay the course.*"
 - a. Satan doesn't always appear as a roaring lion, he often shows up like a slippery, slimy, slithering subtle split tongued serpent. It's that quiet voice of "reason", it's the half-truths, the justifying it's the making sense of why God's left you, why you don't feel Him.
 2. Paul's bolstering Timothy in God's grace to remind them that these afflictions they were in, were inevitable as they followed Christ (**Matt. 10:17-42; Acts 9:16 14:22; Rom. 8:17-18, 35-39; 1st Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-19**). Interesting that Paul saw fit to speak about suffering, and affliction with a Church plant of just 3 weeks.
- C. For In Fact, We Told You Before When We Were With You That We Would Suffer Tribulation, Just As It Happened, and You Know—This Gospel of the Kingdom that Paul is preaching, is very different from the Gospel of Western Pragmatism.
1. This Western Gospel hasn't prepared you for pandemics. We haven't prepared you for persecution. We haven't prepared you for tribulation. We haven't prepared you for a season when you're hated by all nations for His namesake. We haven't prepared you for famines.
 2. On the contrary we've prepared you for success in the world's eyes. We've prepared you to live your best life now, today, here in this moment. We've prepared you to return to comfort, to increase, to more consumerism.
 - a. We shouldn't be shocked when God's family is spending much of their time online considering if it's time to rebel against the government, to openly criticize our governor, speaking so openly about his wicked agenda against the Church and the family of God and how we're being persecuted. This is what we've bred you to do, to be more political more than we are prophetic, to seek our reward here on earth, and forgo your reward in eternity, to fight for the American dream and lose the kingdom connection in the age to come. After all, here on earth is where we are trying to tether our lives, tether our families, and to tether our hopes.
 3. Beloved, tribulation isn't going away. It can't be prayed away, faithed away, casted out of the way, anointed with oil outta the way, or simply rebuked outta the way. This is the appointment of God for His family. Beloved, the only pathway leading to God's eternal kingdom is a long, tattered road of tribulation.
 4. The question isn't whether or not we will face tribulation. The question is, will we be faithful in the midst of tribulation WHEN it comes?
 - a. Best, a great theologian rightly said, "*Paul's not thinking of a time when tribulation will be over, and life will get back to normal; he's saying, this is normal.*"
 5. I think this is the challenge of our current cultural moment; where is God in the middle of it, not at the end of it. Where is He right now, and can we dwell together with Him?

IV. DON'T LET SATAN DECEIVE YOU (1ST THESSALONIANS 3:5)

1. **1st Thessalonians 3:5** "*For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.*"

- B. For This Reason, When I Could No Longer Endure It, I Sent To Know Your Faith, Lest By Some Means The Tempter Had Tempted You, and Our Labor Might Be In Vain—Paul is speaking here about intolerable suspense, like the kind that he just couldn't take anymore.
1. Paul sent Timothy both for the Church and for himself. Paul's personal and pastoral purpose in sending Timothy was twofold; to strengthen the Church, and to know how his disciples, his children were fairing under the current afflictions.
 2. Paul's concern was for their faith. Did the faith he deliver to them survive the time of testing, and did it include the grace to Persevere?
 - a. What kind of faith are we delivering to God's family today? Are we delivering a faith that endures, that stays the test of time? A faith that's upheld under the persecution of pressure (**Jude 3**)?
 3. It's clear from Paul's concern, and from many other places he speaks of the same thing, that he believes that our faith can be shipwrecked, meaning we start out, but then at some point run aground (**1st Timothy 1:19; 1st Cor. 9:24-27; 2nd Thess. 2:3; Rev. 3:5**).
 - a. As followers of Jesus we gotta keep our head on swivel. Satan is always creeping about in life, in the background, lurking, working to get us off track.