

LSB 1 Thess. 2:17 - 3:3

17 But we, brothers, having been taken away from you for a short while—in face but not in heart—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Is it not even you, before our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy. 3:1 Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we were pleased 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 shaken by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

Friday morning on Albert Mohler's "The Briefing", Al was commenting on the several articles in the New York Times about community and isolation and the new pandemic we're witnessing that is more real than the last one, and it's the mental health pandemic caused by loneliness.

God's design, even before the fall, was for man to not be alone. In Genesis 2:18 in the creation sequence, God brings all of the animals to Adam for him to name and all of the animals have their mates but Adam doesn't. And God creates woman from a rib out of Adam.

God's design was originally for us to fellowship directly with Him, in the cool of the evening, community with God Himself. But also, God gave Adam a wife, Eve, and then children came, there was family, and ultimately the children grow up and leave father and mother and they cleve to a mate of their own and more children come.

Enlarged families. Tribes. Communities dependent on each other for safety and work. Always within all of the structures there is marriage, family, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, wider family, community, towns, cities. God's design because it isn't good for man to be alone.

Within my single life time, all of that has been re-defined. God is dead.

Killed by secularism. And secularism's sacred doctrine is absolute personal autonomy. Absolute personal freedom apart from all of the old structures.

You decide who you are, what gender you wish to be if any at all, how your sexual urges and desires will be satisfied, what or how long any associations with other humans will be, and whether or not children will be allowed, or extinguished. You are god so you decide what is right or wrong for you.

How great is that! Rules and norms are gone because you are god and you make up the rules and norms. Except one problem. Actually multiple problems. Anxiety, panic, and loneliness that even though you're god, you can't seem to control. Loneliness is the big driver. It's lonely being god.

We have painted ourselves into a corner of pandemic loneliness and mental anxiety and instability. Turns out we're lousy at being god. It sounded like a good idea, but loneliness causes anxiety and panic and instability. Turns out a long term wife and a bunch of kids and grandkids is a lot more fun.

Paul battled loneliness, the same as anyone else. That's why he surrounded himself with a team of likeminded ministers of the gospel for his travels, and everywhere he went, the words of Jesus in Mark 10 became true for him.

In Mark 10, following the story of the rich young ruler, Jesus tells Peter;

*28 Peter began to say to Him, "Look, we have left everything and followed You." 29 "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one **who** has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundredfold in the present age—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, along with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life....*

In this passage we're considering this morning, Paul is the personification of what Jesus told Peter here.

Within just a few weeks at Thessalonica, Paul has gathered unto himself mothers and sisters and brothers and fathers and children of untold numbers. The people of Thessalonica who came out of this world and clinged to Christ became Paul's family with depths of relationship equal to any family.

We are all brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers to each other because we all have one intimate brother in common, the Lord, Jesus Christ who purchased us out of this world and gathered us all, in common with each other, to Himself, and has made us a family with each other.

This passage is a polemic argument again. Actually a continuation of the previous polemic. Part of the opposition that followed Paul from place to place and tried to destroy what God had put together would have been the argument, especially in these special conditions: "Paul says he loves you? Where is he? He doesn't care about you. He abandoned you. Paul?? He made you into orphans."

"You came out of the world, they hate you now because of Christ, but where is your so-called spiritual father? He abandoned you. He doesn't care about you. You've become orphans hanging out here in space by yourselves. Abandoned." Something like that. And what we have here is Paul's polemic argument against the detractors who wanted to undo everything Paul did.

17 But we, brothers, having been taken away from you for a short while—in face but not in heart—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

The first words we want to look at in this verse are the ones translated *having been taken away from you*.

The word is *ap_orphanizó* (ap-or-fan-id'-zo) and our word orphan comes directly from this greek word almost unchanged. Many of the translations use the word bereft. *But we, brothers, having been bereft from you*

We've all watched those TV movies meant to rip our hearts out where some higher power intervenes and some infant child is ripped away from the single caregiver it has ever known. Designed to break our hearts of empathy.

That's what Paul is describing here. Literally he was ripped away from them, torn asunder by duress, a forced parting, with the effect that he is orphaned from them and they are orphaned from him. Something has made both of them orphans.

From Acts ch. 17 we read the account again;

5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. 6 And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; 7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." 8 And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. 9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them. 10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea;

There's a mob sent to get Paul, but not finding Paul, they settle for Jason who we believe probably was holding the church in his house. And the mob drags Jason before the governing authorities and it gets ugly.

Everyone is stirred up to near riot stage by these folks who hate Paul, and Jason by association, and Jason makes some kind of a pledge in order to restore calm of some kind and be released. And then the next sentence is that Paul is ferried away by night.

Paul is literally torn asunder, orphaned if you will, from these brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, and children that he loves. Ripped apart from

those that he loves. For their safety and his own. We don't know what the pledge that Jason made actually was. Get rid of Paul and promise that he won't be back. Something like that. Then the detractors came and said, Paul doesn't love you. Where is he? And Paul answers back;

17 But we, brothers, having been taken away from you for a short while—in face but not in heart—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

The detractors accuse Paul of not caring enough about them to not have orphaned them. But Paul states his case. We were ripped asunder but he is all the more eager to see their what? faces.

I'm going to do a sidebar just here. I was studying this passage and the Holy Spirit prompted my mind as I studied these words. The word face. with great desire to see your . . . face.

It's a very common word in the Bible, both old testament and new. And Paul uses it here to mean physical presence. To see your face is to be physically present with you as opposed to being separated.

And as you read throughout the Bible, the face is the seat of the emotions, sometimes rendered as countenance. God gave us faces that reflect the glory of the imago dei, the intelligence given by God. We are image bearers of God because he gave us intelligence above the animals.

Sometimes we give anthropomorphic qualities to animals. Dogs for instance can reveal different emotions in their faces. To an extent. Cats only look at you with quizical disdain. To a cat you're a useful idiot. He who opens the can of food.

But humans display their God glorifying (or not) intelligence in their faces. Paul was eager to see the faces of his brothers and sisters and children at Thessalonica. To see someone's face is to have a connection. God designed that. A person's countenance can be the beginning and ending of

almost every possible discourse.

Poker players. We like to talk about a poker face. A face where you purposely do not give any clues to the person looking at your face, trying to figure out if you're bluffing or if indeed you do have that royal flush.

Pam tells me I have a useless poker face. Something about my eyebrows. Apparently I can't effectively hide much from her as she reads my face, my countenance. She'll say, "your eyebrow is twitching".

God gave us faces that are glorious in intelligence and often very revealing of our inner self. We can try to hide what's inside. Some of us are better at it than others. Our faces are a window into our souls. They literally shine with God's glory.

Paul wanted to see their faces. How is it with these that he loves so deeply that he has been torn asunder from. Their faces will tell him. Each face will express to him the needs of each of their individual souls.

Why am I belaboring this idea of faces being windows of both intelligence and also the very soul? Given to us by God to reveal the intelligence He has given us in order to reflect glory back onto Him.

Beloved, I truly believe that the people who want us to cover up our faces for no scientifically proved benefit, also by the way, the same people who ordered us not to meet as christians, face to face, the folks who locked down the churches, are whether they know it or not, carrying out a satanic purpose.

Cover up the glory of God, the intelligence, the window into our souls. Lock up the churches. Hand in hand. I think I see a dark connection in that. People wandering up and down Main Street with face masks on? Even now. What is that?

Our faces glorify God, even if we are God haters. The face is the window

into the intelligence that is the image of God that He has given to us. I am increasingly suspect of anyone who mandates that we cover up our faces that glorify the Creator.

Satan would have us cover up the glory of God's creation. Satan would have us cease meeting together. Satan would have the church houses boarded up. Satan would put us all in a room alone with a computer to "virtually" connect us together. That's darkness. And the newspapers are talking about the effects. Mental illness. Loneliness. Anxiety. Depression. Meaninglessness. Suicides. Especially for teens and younger folks.

Paul wanted to see their faces. Writing letters to them is helpful to a point. He can express his love in words. But right here, he says, it's incomplete until I can see your faces. Agree with me or not, I just wanted you to think about the glory of the faces God has given to us. They reflect the glory of the intelligence that God has given to our souls. Different from the animals. Don't cover them up without a really good reason.

How interesting that in the darkest most Satanic parts of the world, the women are forced to cover their faces. I see a connection beloved. OK, I'll move on.

17 But we, brothers, having been taken away from you for a short while—in face but not in heart—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.

Perhaps the detractors that were trying to discredit and undo everything that God had done through Paul were saying something like, "sure, first he abandons you and then when things cooled off, he doesn't come himself, he sends Timothy." "You weren't good enough for Paul to come, so he sends his lackey." Just guessing, based on the polemic argument.

We wanted to come to you! Me! I! Paul! I wanted to come most ardently.

I tried to come. *But Satan hindered me.*

Paul had an exceptional sense of discerning the spirits. In Acts 16 it's the Holy Spirit who blocked Paul from advancing until the vision of the Macedonian man saying *come over here and help us*. Paul understood that it was God who hindered his movements until the direction where God wanted him to go was made clear.

This time it's Satan who hinders Paul. And we know and understand that Satan is limited in what he can do to hinder and trouble the saints.

Jesus told Peter; Satan has requested . . . requested from God . . . to sift Peter like wheat. Satan says 'That Peter is just so much dross. He isn't real. He isn't wheat. Let me put him through the sifter and we'll find out, he's chaff.

And God said, Go ahead.

We see *that* in the story of Job. Same thing. Let me at him and we'll find out very quickly, Job is a phony. Sure he looks like he's righteous. Who wouldn't. You've built a wall around him and blessed him. Take the wall away and remove the blessing and he'll curse you. He's a phony.

Satan cannot hinder Paul or for that matter, any of us, without permission from God who owns Paul. And apparently Paul knew the difference. He had that discernment.

Paul tried, perhaps on multiple occasions, to return to his beloved children, his brothers and his sisters and his mothers and fathers at Thessalonica. He longs to gaze at their faces. To know how it is with them. To preach and teach and build them up in their walks with Christ.

But Satan hindered him. Satan blocked him. Effectively. Remember in the story of Daniel's prayer. An angel is dispatched with the answer and was blocked by Satan's forces of evil until re-inforcements came to overcome the block. It was days of waiting for Daniel before the angel finally

arrived.

There is a spiritual world engaged in battle beyond our eyes. Paul understood that Satan blocked his desire and efforts to come to the Thessalonians. Remember, Satan can only be in one place at one time. He isn't like God who is omnipresent.

For Satan to himself have blocked Paul is indicative of the fact that Paul was the single greatest force for God's glory on the earth. We see very little resistance from Satan or his hordes, precisely for the reasons I just stated.

19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Is it not even you, before our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

There is a single moment in time when all of the saints will meet Jesus, in the air. You understand that, right. A moment in time when the living and the dead will hear the words of God, spoken words, with trumpet like sound, saying **Come Up Here**.

Revelation chapter 4, immediately after Jesus deals with the church universal, He writes 7 letters for all time that speak to the universal church of the called out ones. And then in chapter 4 we hear a voice, like the sound of a trumpet, that says "Come Up Here" and after that we never again see the church in the prophetic book of the Revelation.

We are waiting for a moment in time when Jesus will return, in the air, and receive His church. All of His church, from the apostles day to our own. All of the saints, saved during the entire church age, will assemble in the sky above, upon the return of Jesus, and I choose to believe, the audible words like the sound of a trumpet. Come Up Here.

I can't get that ancient line from a first century hymn out of my head. It returns to my memory often. Eph. 4:7,8

7 But unto every one of us grace is given according to the measure of the

gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

I think those rather cryptic words speak of the rapture of the church. Think about it. We were captured by sin. Helpless to do anything to undo sin. Captured. But Jesus purchased and captured away some of the captives.

We were captured by sin until Jesus freed us and captured us out of sin. He led captivity captive. And on that day He will give gifts to men. I think that's what Paul is talking about.

Paul is saying, on that day, when we all meet Jesus, in the air, there is a sense in which Paul will present a big portion of the church, to Jesus. We are his glory and his crown.

There's a bit of a pyramid scheme going on here. Because there's a very real sense in which long after Paul was dead, I'm still in the line of the people who he had a direct effect on of freeing them from sin.

It was words that Paul wrote, *If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*, Romans 8:31 that God used to quicken my heart from death to life. I'm way down on the bottom row of the pyramid, as usual, and Paul gets some credit for everyone below him. I'm also, in a sense, part of Paul's joy and crown, as well as Peter's and John's and Marks, and all of the other author's of this book.

That pyramid's not quite full. Not until that day. There's still time for us to go and win people that we can present to Christ on that day. Plenty of joy and hope and crowns to go around. We need to be about the Lord's business of gathering more folks that can be presented to Him on that day that He appears in the sky to gather all of His saints home.

Paul says, of course I wanted to see your faces. You beloved ones will be mine to present to Jesus on that glorious day. You are literally my crown on that day.

Chapter 3:1 Therefore

Why is the therefore there for? Because Paul suffers from the ripping apart of those whom he loves from himself, because he is an orphan from them and they from him, and because his care and concern is very real, so much so that it takes Satan himself to hinder Paul from returning to see their faces;

Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we were pleased to be left behind at Athens alone,

This is a bit of poetic license for Paul. Because the record shows that Paul was a mess by himself. Paul didn't do well, by himself. He was absolutely reliant on the men who accompanied him and ministered with him. Paul is like the energizer bunny and the men who ministered with him are the batteries. There was necessary synergy there. They empowered him somehow.

For Paul, apparently Silas was already off doing some ministry task away from Paul, and for Paul to let Timothy go, in order to minister to the folks at Thessalonica, was not pleasure at all. It was at great cost, great personal sacrifice to Paul, that he sent Timothy to Thessalonica and was left alone.

According to Acts 17, Timothy and Silas were left at Berea while the same jews were hounding Paul's movements and causing trouble, so that he left Timothy and Silas behind and the brethren took him all the way to Athens, and then those brothers also departed. Paul was alone. Not good for Paul.

It says that his spirit was provoked every day by this city of idolatry. Not good for Paul to be alone. To him, it was a great cost.

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 shaken by these afflictions,

It was a big sacrifice for Paul to not only be bereft of the Thessalonians, but now also, for their benefit and joy, Paul is bereft of . . . everyone. Since Satan hindered Paul from going, Paul does the next best thing and sends Timothy to encourage and strengthen the church at Thessalonica.

Paul will do anything, putting himself in weakness and loneliness in order for his beloved brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, and children to be strengthened and encouraged.

3 so that no one would be shaken by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

Affliction was very real. Hindered by Satan. Jews hiring thugs and causing riots in order to stop the progress of Paul. Afflictions and disruptions. Trouble. Paul says I've sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage so that you won't get shaken by the multiple afflictions.

The Thessalonians were in the sifter. Paul sends Timothy so they won't get shaken to pieces. We'll speak more on this next time, but vs. 3 begs the question; If it please God to prove us with affliction, will we be shaken to pieces?

Trust me when I say, the church we've known and grown up in, in America, has never been afflicted. What will happen if that changes?

The initial part of separating the wheat from the chaff is a sifter. A big percentage of the chaff gets removed, separated from the wheat, initially in a sifter. It's a separating process, designed to separate the wheat from all of the worthless junk. Wheat is what you want. The rest gets burned.

The church in my life span and for a couple hundred years in our land has had almost no affliction. It's almost as if Satan finally woke up and discovered that affliction purify's the wheat, separates the chaff, so maybe we'll just not afflict and let the church become impure. No cost christianity.

Haul in the catch in the net and don't separate the junk fish from the good ones. Mix up our metaphor's.

Covid has been an eye opener. If you ask Google specifically how many churches closed directly related to the effects of Covid you will learn that church attendance dropped 45% before and after Covid. You'll also learn that 1 in every 5 churches closed the doors and got boarded up. We see it in our own town. A prominent church on Main street, vanished. Other churches, diminished and barely hanging on.

Covid was a very minor affliction. The effect on the weak and sickly church in our land is alarming. What happens if real Satanic affliction comes to this land. And yet Paul tells the Thessalonians, and us, totally, by extension, these words are written to us, people;

*3 so that no one would be shaken by these afflictions, **for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.***

Beloved, Evangelicalism lost 45% with a non affliction. What's going to happen to us when real affliction comes? Kind of a wake up call.

Paul says I sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage you so that you won't be shaken by affliction. Real affliction! And then Paul says something that we've never experienced and that is almost completely foreign to us. Forgotten truths.

for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

Think about this now. We were captured, held captive by Satan and sin. But someone swooped in and captured us away from our original captivity. He holds us apart from the captivity of Satan. We now belong to Him. Set free from captivity! And yet we still live in Satan's world? How's that gonna work?

We're like enemy combatants living as a cell inside enemy territory. Why

would you think you're destined for a free easy ride in this world which is now enemy territory? That's nonsense.

Paul comes right out and tells the church, You folks, you who have been captured away from Satan and sin, who continue to dwell in his world, freed from him, alive to fellowship with God, Satan's great enemy, how could you think you're destined for ease and comfort in Satan's territory?

for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For what Paul? Affliction. Affliction is normative. Paul says so right here. The next world is where we win. This world is Satan's turf. Affliction is normal. Expect it.

Beloved, we may well experience being sifted before we hear those words we long to hear. Come Up Here. Sifting is normative. We aren't used to it, it'll come as a shock and surprise if God allows that before we depart. Me too. I'm soft and fat and weak from spiritual muscle atrophy. Non-use.

I'm going to close our portion in Paul's letter this morning with words from Peter. Just so you know, Paul wasn't the single voice saying these truths to the church; Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12,13;

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial that has come upon you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed at the revelation of His glory....

Sounds like an echo in the room of what Paul just said. Common knowledge to the first christians. Sort of bizarre sounding to us. *for you yourselves know that we have been destined for (affliction)* I fear the church no longer knows this truth. We need to pay attention.

Jesus Himself said to us, *In this world you will have trouble.* Expect trouble. *But take heart because I have overcome the world.* Trouble is normal, if it comes, but ultimately, we win.