

# The Christian Arsenal

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## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-3:5

Today, as we continue our study in *1 Thessalonians*, I want us to see the concern Paul had for the folks he had led to the Lord in Thessalonica.

### 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18...

The Apostle Paul is writing to undergird these believers in Thessalonica and to assure them of his love for them and his desire to see them. And Paul uses strong language to convey that feeling of love and affection.

Look at verse 17...

When have you used this term “bereft” (NAS) lately? The NIV uses the phrase **“when we were torn away from you...”** and that’s the literal translation of the word “bereft”. It speaks of ***grief, bereavement*** and ***loneliness***.

Paul loved these folks and his heart was heavy and broken because he couldn’t see them and spend time with them. The longing of Paul’s heart was to know **how they were doing...if they were growing, if their faith was becoming stronger or weaker.**

So many times it’s *“out of sight, out of mind”* with us, isn’t it, but not with Paul. I believe we can best relate to how we felt about our husbands when we were dating. It wasn’t “out of sight, out of mind” for us, was it? We felt a deep longing to be with him and to find out how he was doing and what he was thinking. And this is how Paul was feeling toward the believers in Thessalonica and may I say to you...**I truly believe this is how God wants us to feel toward other believers.**

Paul thought about these folks day in and day out and he had a great desire to see their face... **“but,”** Paul said, **“Satan prevented me from doing this.”**

Paul wanted to go see the Thessalonians, **but Satan kept him from going.**

How? How did Satan keep Paul from Thessalonica? Well, some think by **illness**. Paul is thought to have been frail and perhaps his strength and stamina was not what it ought to have been.

Or it could have been that there was trouble in other churches that he started...maybe Paul was busy “putting out fires.” But, more than likely, Paul was being subjected to more persecution and affliction, and we’ll see Paul mention this later on in the lesson. Maybe the Jews of Thessalonica had sent a threatening message to Paul...warning him not to come back or maybe he was undergoing persecution in Athens...persecution that we’re not told about in Scripture.

We don’t know how Satan hindered Paul, but he did.

**And we know he still does this today.**

**He puts obstacles in the way of God’s people.**

**He tears down and discourages...he creates difficulties and depression.**

**He hinders missionaries abroad by bring persecution and hardships on them.**

**He hinders evangelism here at home by influencing our leaders...our judges to take prayer and the Ten Commandments out of our schools. He hinders Christianity by organizing groups like the ACLU.**

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(You know, maybe with so much emphasis on prayer today, we'll see prayer allowed again in our schools.)

Satan also hinders **us**, as individual believers. He doesn't want us to speak to our lost next door neighbor, or our lost co-worker or our lost family member. **How many folks died lost** in the World Trade Center or the Pentagon or on those four planes because Satan hindered someone from bringing the message of salvation through Jesus to them?

By the way, how many folks have you heard interviewed this past couple of weeks who have mentioned the name of Jesus? There have been a few, but very, very few!!!

Satan has power and Satan also has emissaries. Remember when Daniel prayed and fasted for three weeks and he hadn't gotten an answer from the Lord and finally, Daniel had a vision and an angel appeared to Daniel and said that he had been attempting to make his way to Daniel from the first day of Daniel's prayer. But, for 21 days...**three whole weeks**...the demons of the kingdom of Persia had withstood him and would have continued withstanding him, except that Michael, the archangel, had come to help him.

We don't know how many **angels** surround us or how many **demons** surround us, do we?

**I believe we'd be absolutely astounded if we knew!**

So, maybe Satan simply sent his demons to Paul to hem Paul in on every side...we don't know how...but somehow Paul was prevented by Satan from coming to the Thessalonians.

**Verses 19-20...**

Paul calls these people his joy. Now, there are a lot of things Paul did and felt that I know nothing about, but I can say this...I **do** know that he meant when he called the Thessalonians **his joy**...because you are that to me! You don't know how much joy you bring to my life!

But, what I really want us to look at in this passage is this...

We've mentioned this before. Paul was a great **missionary**.

Paul was a great **evangelist**. Paul was a great **church planter**.

Paul was a great **teacher** and **discipler**. And today, we're going to see Paul as a great **soul-winner**.

And in this passage Paul speaks of three truths a soul-winner can know.

## **1) a soul-winner's hope**

What is a soul-winner's hope? Well, the hope of a soul-winner is the hope of **all** believers...and that is that **Jesus is coming again!!**

**Verse 19...**

We are living in the aftermath of the greatest attack ever launched on our country. We're living in days when the vast majority of Americans have no idea that America has a choice...as Bro. Bob put it in his letter this past week... "**America has a choice: REVIVAL OR RUIN.**"

**We are living in days when the church can make a difference...a real difference! These aren't hopeless days. These are days when we must exercise real faith. And I believe we can be used mightily if we are clean and willing vessels.**

And oh, how I pray that our country experiences a spiritual awakening and that lost people come to Jesus and saved people get revived!

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But, ultimately the only real hope you and I have is that one day Jesus will come again and when He comes, we shall be with Him. Right now, He is with us in the person of the Holy Spirit, but one day we shall be **with Him**. And just as He sees us now, we shall see Him then. That's the soul-winner's hope...that's the believer's hope...JESUS IS COMING AGAIN!!!

## 2) the soul-winner's joy

What is the joy that is unique to the soul-winner? Let me suggest several facets of this joy...

### a) we have a joyful story to tell...

We have something to say. There was time a when I was lost and on my way to an eternal hell, but the Holy Spirit came and spoke salvation to my spirit and I realized that I was a sinner and Jesus died to save me. And there's joy in those who are believers because we have a story to tell, but also

### b) there's much joy in telling the story...

I hope you are as excited about telling folks how Jesus saved you as you are about telling them some other "good news" about your life.

### c) there is joy in seeing people's lives changed when they receive Jesus Christ...

Jesus makes a difference in a person's life...and He makes a difference in a person's death. There is real fulfillment to a person when he sees the person he witnessed to and led to the Lord Jesus begin to live for Jesus and then to know that when that person dies, he will spend eternity with Jesus.

### d) there is joy in knowing you will see the person you led to Jesus in heaven one day...

Won't it be a joy to see the person who led you to Jesus in heaven one day? And won't it be a joy to see those whom you've shared the Gospel with and/or led to the Lord in heaven one day?

Paul told the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 1** that **they** would be **his** reason to boast in the day of the Lord because of what **they** meant to **him**, but also **he** would be their reason to boast because of what **he** meant to **them**.

Not only does Paul speak of the soul-winner's **hope** and the soul-winner's **joy**, he also speaks of

## 3) the soul-winner's crown

Paul calls this his crown of **exultation**, crown of **joy**, crown of **rejoicing**.

Did you know there are actually four other crowns that a believer can earn?

Over in the **Book of 1 Corinthians**, Paul talks about

### 1) an incorruptible crown

In **1 Corinthians 9**, Paul talks about the kind of crown an athlete would earn because he has disciplined his body and worked out and trained and he ran a race and when he won that race a crown was placed upon his head. That crown may have been made of gold or silver or even a wreath of leaves laced together. Whatever it was made of, Paul said in time it would fade or tarnish or wilt or diminish. It was a **corruptible crown**.

But, he says to the believer who will be disciplined to spend time in God's Word and be disciplined to spend time building his spiritual life and be disciplined to

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have a daily quiet time and be disciplined to pray and spend time denying himself and taking up his cross and following Jesus...there is a crown...an **incorruptible crown**.

## 2) a crown of righteousness...

Paul tells Timothy in **2 Timothy 4:8**:

"I've fought a good fight, I've finished my course, I've kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness... not only for me only but for all them that love His appearing."

Paul says there is a crown waiting for those who lovingly look for Jesus to come again!

We ought to live each day expecting the Lord Jesus Christ to come. We ought not be anywhere or be doing anything, or reading anything, or watching or saying anything that would bring shame to us if He should come back that moment. We shouldn't be doing anything that would make us ashamed at His coming.

We ought to love and long for His appearing so much, that we would be ready!!

## 3) a crown of glory

This crown is found in **1 Peter 5** and it is awarded to God's undershepherds...the shepherds of His flocks...

This crown is for the faithful pastors who lead their people and who feed them the precious Word Sunday after Sunday.

## 4) a crown of life

**James 1:12** tells us this crown is for the believer who perseveres under **trials** and **persecutions** and **tribulations**. Over in **Revelation 2**, Jesus said,

"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

I don't know that any of **us** will earn that crown. I believe there are believers who will. There are situations even in our own country where a person is disowned for becoming a Christian. Their families will never speak to them again. In fact, many times they'll consider them as dead and have a funeral service for them.

There are folks in prison right now for preaching the Gospel. There are places in this world where a believer will lose his job and even his life, **but I tell you, for that child who suffers great persecution, and who remains faithful to God... God says, "I will reward you with a crown of life."**

So, counting the crown of rejoicing or "soul-winner's crown" that we see in **1 Thessalonians 2**, there are **five crowns** available to be earned by the believers. At best a believer can have all five crowns, but most of us won't. Hopefully we'll have one or two.

**What are we going to do with these crowns? Are we going to walk around heaven for eternity with those crowns on our heads?**

Have you ever been to the Passion Play? Remember at the end of the presentation when the saints bring their crowns and lay them at the feet of Jesus?

That's a beautiful picture of what **Revelation 4** teaches. John tells us in **Revelation 4** that the crowns will be taken and placed at the feet of Jesus!

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The Bible definitely teaches rewards in heaven.

And we should desire these crowns...but not so we can walk around heaven and say, "See my crowns" but so that one day at His blessed presence we can take these crowns and place them at the feet of the dear Lord Jesus Christ, and say, **"These belong to You, Jesus, because You redeemed me unto God by Your precious blood, and it's only by Your grace that I have them to present to you."**

Well, in the time we have left, let's look at **chapter 3...**

**3:1-5...**

In these verses we see Paul's deep concern for the folks of Thessalonica.

Paul was in Athens when he wrote this. Let me just remind you what had happened to Paul thus far in his ministry...

Let me remind you that Paul had been persecuted, imprisoned, beaten and run out of one town after another for the preaching of the Gospel.

Eventually, Paul preached in Thessalonica, was run out of there, made his way to Berea and then traveled to Athens. (Just thinking of all that travel in those days makes me weary!!!)

Well, Scripture doesn't tell us that Paul was **physically** abused in Athens, though he might have been, but Scripture does tell us he was **mentally** abused. He was scoffed at and sneered at and made fun of. Remember that Athens was the "intellectual capital of the world." And of course, Paul's preaching was foolishness to the learned men of Athens.

Now, I said all that to simply say this... It was while Paul was in Athens that he realized he couldn't stand not knowing what was going on with the Thessalonians.

So, Paul said, in essence...

"I wanted so badly to find out what was going on with you but I couldn't. So, I stayed alone in Athens and sent Timothy to you.

I wanted Timothy to strengthen you and encourage your faith. I didn't want you to be worried about me and my affliction. Remember how we kept **telling** you that all this would happen? Well, **it has**, it has come to pass! But, what about **your** faith? Has the tempter tempted you? **Our labor isn't in vain, is it?**"

You know, if we look at this time in Paul's life...

From a purely human perspective, we would have urged Paul to take a break.

We would say,

"Paul, don't you think you've been through enough? Don't you think you've done your part? Don't you think you need to take some time out to be refreshed and renewed...a little rest and relaxation?"

Paul, why don't you just get away and go on a little vacation from all this soul-winning and discipling and teaching and preaching? You're right on the Aegean Sea...why don't you go down and just lie around on the beach?"

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But, Paul didn't do that. He sent Timothy to Thessalonica and eagerly awaited his report. And by the way, think about Timothy...

We know from other passages that Timothy was young and inexperienced and timid. Yet, this young believer was willing to go back to Thessalonica, knowing the affliction that Paul had suffered there...

By the way, how could Timothy do this? He did it by faith! Timothy simply loved the Lord and he loved Paul and he loved the Thessalonians enough to go back and see how they were doing.

The point I'm trying to make is that Paul never quit being concerned about others. And he was so concerned that he gladly sent his companion and co-laborer away and was willing to be left alone in a hostile place to await his return.

The affliction that came upon Paul all during his ministry was no surprise to him. God had told him when He called him that he would suffer much for the sake of the Gospel. Yet, he was never deterred, was he?

Paul always used his affliction to further the gospel. He said all these afflictions made him strong.

You know...we've seen such an outpouring of manpower in New York City these past two weeks...men and women coming into the city from all over our country. Men and women eager to help...men and women seeing things in that destruction, as one rescue worker said, "that no one should ever, ever see."

And I can't help but wonder if the **church** is going to come to the fore and help in this affliction. I believe God will hold us accountable if we don't. The church needs to be a voice of **wisdom** and **comfort** and **love** in our country today.

**The question we hear every day is "Why would God allow this?"**

We don't know...but we know this...God has given man a free will and the men who did this acted from that free will. I believe God is telling the church, "Now, **you** must act. Now is **your** opportunity to go to a lost and hurting nation. Now is **your** opportunity to tell the lost and hurting folks in America that I love them and I sent My Son to die for them."

What do we do with the anger we feel toward these men and their supporters? I believe God would have us forgive them, but to back our own government as our government seeks to hold them accountable.

We don't know the entire picture, but we know the One who does! We're much like Habakkuk when God told him, "**Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days that you would not believe if you were told.**"

Did God **cause** this? I don't believe He did. Did God **allow** this? Yes, He did. God is sovereign...and I believe the thing we must hold onto is that He can use it for His glory and the furtherance of His kingdom. It may be that God will use our country to put an end to terrorism in order to save Israel!

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Well, let's wind this up...let's get back to Paul. We said Paul was not deterred in God's calling on his life. He had such a concern for other people. I believe God would have you and me to be imitators of Paul in this area of his life. I believe our need today is that we follow Paul's example.

Paul said in **verse 5** that he feared the tempter might have tempted them and **"our labor should be in vain"** (NAS); **"our efforts might have been useless."** (NIV)

**There is a real need in the church today to be that concerned about each other. We need to lift each other up. We need to not give up on each other. We need to refrain from judging each other.**

We all have felt as though our labor was in vain and our efforts were useless, haven't we? We all know folks who were once in church...active in this very class and they're no longer coming. We need to be as concerned about **them** as Paul was about these folks in Thessalonica. If the tempter has tempted these folks, that's all the more reason for us to encourage them to come back!

Surely Paul won all the crowns that Scripture tells us about. Paul poured his life out...not for his **own** glory, but for the glory of God and for the pure joy of serving His Savior.

My prayer today is that we will share the Gospel with others and that when we get to heaven we will all have a crown of rejoicing to lay at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My prayer for us today is that we will be concerned about each other...  
That we would be willing to be inconvenienced for each other's  
physical well being and that we would be anxious for each other's  
spiritual well being.

We need to be as concerned about each other as Paul was about the Thessalonians. We need to be concerned about our country.

God said, **"If My people who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."**

Finally, we need to not allow the afflictions of this world to deter us and even if Satan hinders us for a time, we should not give up...Paul didn't and neither should we! What an example for us to follow!!