

2/14/21 - 1 Thes. 2:17-20 - "Hope, Joy, and Crown"

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[0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, starting in verse 17, it reads, But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us.

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

This is the word of the Lord. Up until today, we've received great insight into the unique challenges that faced Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Thessalonica.

And during these trying times of their planting endeavors, that ended up only being a couple weeks long because they were drove out of Thessalonica.

They had a premature, abrupt departure from this church plant. And the non-Christians, the unbelievers in Thessalonica, were attacking what God was building, which included its leaders, those who were beginning that building process.

[1 : 26] The best strategy to bring down a church is to attack the integrity of the leaders in charge, isn't it? In this case, Paul seemed to be the object of railing accusations, as we've seen over the past several weeks in chapter 2, starting in verse 1 of chapter 2, as Paul contends for his character and his care, and that he wasn't trying to flatter this church as his opponents were.

The unbelievers acted as opportunists in this church. They capitalized upon Paul's absence to instill doubt in this new church's mind, to not trust him, calling into question Paul's objective, Paul's motives.

That he's in it for himself. And today, Paul aims to bring reassurance in these short couple verses in chapter 2. And I believe that there's fewer verses in Scripture condensed in one small location in Scripture, which attests to the affectioned endearments, endearment that Paul had for this body of believers, of those who he calls partners of the gospel.

And this short passage will encapsulate the heart of what it means to be a Christian with other Christians, especially how we can protect the unity of the church, and finally, how to change our perspective when the unity may be abruptly disrupted.

We're going to do this in three sections today, and we're going to be splitting the verses up a little bit. But let's pray as we begin and turn to the Lord in prayer as we enter into the preaching of his word.

[3 : 09] Let's pray. Father, we turn to you at this moment with many opinions in this world. We're surrounded by opinions from a day-to-day basis, living in a social media-driven world and a politically tense world.

Father, we turn to your word for truth at this moment. For the truth to break through opinion. For the truth to have supremacy over all opinion and even how we feel.

Father, I hope this text can challenge all of us in our faith and walk and direct us closer to you as we are image bearers of Jesus Christ. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen? All right. We've got section one for you today called A Unified Church in Distress.

And we're going to see this in verse 17 where it says, But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavored them more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.

[4 : 20] It is worth our time to step back a moment from Paul's words in this passage. And to truly investigate what he's communicating within just one verse.

Within one verse, it almost echoes the same passion, the same fervency that you find in maybe the song of Solomon. Right?

We were torn away from you, brothers, and also sisters in some translations. We were torn away for a moment. We were torn away in person, not in heart.

We endeavored the more eagerly. We endeavored with great desire, which means lust in this passage, with great desire to see you.

Sounds like a Justin Timberlake song, doesn't it? The unity of the church is a love story.

[5 : 24] The unity of the church is a love story, a love that God has purchased, and a love that expresses intimately through binding a community in humility, binding a community in charitability, putting others before our own self, and in that being a sacrifice to one another.

The abrupt departure of this unity caused this church to no longer see Paul as frequently as they did.

Paul was torn away from this church. And his team, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, all received threats and accusations of civil treason.

We saw that in our opening sermon in this series in Acts 17, verse 7. They were charged with accusations of civil treason. And Paul continues in the language of that deep and passionate unity found within that close relationship of a family.

Remember, it wasn't too many weeks ago where we talked about the father that he saw himself being that relationship with this church, and that of a mother. Those are his instincts in that close relationship of a family.

[6 : 38] And in that, I believe we are able to sense the emotional turmoil of what Paul is experiencing in this passage. Paul uses a word here to describe this turmoil.

It's called eporphanizo in the original language. It's the term that we get from the word orphan. That when he says, I was torn away from you, he's saying that he was literally orphaned from them.

Paul was orphaned from his spiritual family. Many of us may not have too much of a relation to what it means to be an orphan.

Thanks be to God. But maybe we do. Maybe we've experienced it even in Hollywood. It doesn't take much more than a well-cued song and well-skilled actors to experience that emotion of being torn away from your loved ones.

Orphans. We experience this in different instances, even in the sudden death of a family member that happens.

[7 : 54] As far as Paul's integrity is concerned, his opponents in Thessalonica were severely jaded in falsehood. They had no idea who he was or his ambition.

The truth is that Paul was a spiritual parent of this church. And through the forced departure, he was separated from his spiritual children.

He was orphaned. This dealt a severe death blow to his motherly instincts, to his fatherly instincts. And I couldn't imagine him sleeping well very soon after that orphaning being done.

Being great distress at his pillow at night. One thing that's true in our day today is that COVID-19 has caused great separation among the family of God, hasn't it?

There are some churches that are not able to meet. California, they're able to meet, I think, at 25% capacity right now. And this has created, I believe, a healthy distress.

[9 : 0 6] A healthy distress in our lives. A distress that we often take for granted, our meeting, being able to meet together. Something that Paul and his team probably went into Thessalonica and never would have imagined them being accused of civil treason.

But then that distress that they experience, that you never know what you have until it's gone sort of distress. I think that's become apparent within our American church.

That's what happens when we aren't able to meet together. In this, the church that is marked in this distress when experiencing this distance is a sure sign of church health, I believe.

That when you are experiencing distress when you are apart from one another, that is a sheer sign of health. Or, in other words, if distance from your church family brings relief to you, we ought to be careful of what it means to be a Christian when that becomes a relief in your life.

Because we see in verse 17 also a terminology of brothers in our translation, but it also translates to brothers and sisters. Notice the relationship Paul is calling upon as well.

[1 0 : 2 2] While his relationship serves of that of a father and a mother being over children, it also serves on an equal playing field, we'll say, with those who look to him as a parent in their faith.

This is important to note, church. Being in a community is testing, isn't it? Being among one another is sometimes annoying at times.

People just get at you and just, you want to avoid that person who has something to say about what they saw in the news and things like that. The things that can annoy one another.

Being in community is testing in those ways. It was testing back in Thessalonica. It's testing today. We sometimes can upset each other. We can offend each other.

We can falsely assume the motives of another and all of a sudden quit our tasks within the church. All of a sudden we become Satan's puppeteers of division within the church.

[1 1 : 2 5] Paul is indicating that at the foot of the cross, there is level ground. We are brothers and sisters. Meaning that there are no tiers of elite Christians or maybe the lesser elite Christians.

And yes, Paul could have probably been the best apologist, most worthy qualified apologist to out-debate probably all of us in our faith. And then reconvert us again and get us baptized again.

Paul was very, very, very, very good with words. He's identifying not only as this elite Christian, but a brother, a sister of his fellow co-workers in this passage.

He's identifying with humility in this passage with brothers and sisters. It brings to mind even my own kids. At times, their relationship can be very tense.

Very tense. And the day can hold all sorts of adventures for my wife and I to come home. And you just hear as you're rocking babies back in the room.

[1 2 : 3 4] Yeah, I'm going to sound like an expert here, but, you know, you hear the complete shriek. Like somebody's arm is getting cut off and we come to find that somebody's dinosaur was stolen.

And that could just be just superficial. God only knows what we're in for with teenagers. All the parents, older parents in our faith, you can wish us good luck.

But I know that's coming. Those times of turmoil, those times of stress throughout the week, of just butting heads, fighting with one another, arguing with one another.

But isn't it funny, even at this early stage in their lives, that they can have the worst day throughout the day, the worst fights, the worst arguments, and the worst bumps and bruises.

But still, I come to find late at night, around three o'clock in the morning, one of them has escaped their bed and has snuggled up to the other, the brother.

[13 : 40] Regardless of what the day held, at the end of the day, they were brothers. Their brotherhood was intact. And we see that being vitally important to recognize in a time of a divided church.

In this, the health of a church is marked in distress being apart, not coming together. Holding up one another, and not by a noose, church.

Holding up one another. Holding up one another in supporting Christ's work and grace in each other's lives. Even amid disagreement. Even amid offense.

And for Paul, his equal standing, namely brothers and sisters in this passage and relationship with these Christians, was torn apart. And it's a time where the Thessalonian church felt that minutes apart were hours.

And hours were days. And days were weeks, weeks, and months. Distress, church, being apart. And Paul reminds them what may seem like an eternity is actually only a small instance in comparison to eternity.

[14 : 56] When they will be together with Jesus. And we see that. He mentions that for a short time in verse 17. But I've got to ask a challenge for all of us today and everyone on the live stream.

Do you find yourself struggling to find that same affection for your brothers and sisters in the faith? And yeah, this can often be testing within our own body of believers.

But what about the church down the road that believes in Jesus Christ? That has the same faith. That has sound doctrine intact.

Do you find yourself struggling to find that same affection for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Might we look at times of relational turmoil, specifically in our midst, as a test of looking past disagreements and humility and charitability.

And uphold the agreement of grace in one another's life, even when we disagree. So are we a bunch of elite Christians, maybe? Youngstown Metro Church.

[16 : 03] Oh, they all got it together, right? Got news for you. Or are we co-laborers in the gospel? Are we laboring together side by side in this battle?

Do we triangulate gossip at different times rather than going straight to the person that we have issues with? And most of all, does our church testify love to both the sinner and the saint?

These are questions we must ponder as we look at Paul's love story in this verse. And we see section two. Satan's goal.

Is hindering the church. Are you with me this morning? Awake? Verse 18 continues.

We were in distress in verse 17. And verse 18 continues. Because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again.

[17 : 11] But Satan hindered us. There's nothing more aggravating in a construction project than delays. There's nothing more aggravating.

All wives can look at your husbands. Yeah. How about that delay on those bathroom, that bathroom remodel that started 10 years ago, right? I'm guilty as well.

My wife's laughing at me too. I'm the chief of starting about 10 different construction projects or remodeling projects at one time. And the house just being torn apart and me thinking I'm going to get the time to get around to it.

But nobody has this feeling of aggravation more than when construction projects are delayed, right?

I come from a degree of construction management. And a lot of things hinge around that project schedule. That timeline from when a project starts, the planning process, to the execution, and the final completion, finally letting occupancy in those buildings and everyone being happy.

[18 : 22] And when that project timeline is delayed, man, it is aggravating, as you can imagine. At these tense times in the church, the young Christians probably were questioning, why is this happening?

Everything was going good. And now all of a sudden, it's like Paul's drove out. We're getting all this intel that he's a bad person and we're not supposed to listen to him.

What is happening? Well, Paul reinforces, church, why this is happening. And it shouldn't be a surprise. Because behind the scenes and behind God's building project, church, lay an adversary who waits for opportunities to impede upon that which God has promised to build.

Right? He says, but Satan hindered us. That they have tried to come back and be united with this church. Time and time again, but Satan hindered us.

And this impediment was experienced through railing accusations that circled and oppressed the new believers in Thessalonica of Paul's pride, of his selfishness, of his abandonment, of his greed.

[19 : 45] Satan is the unseen enemy that has been attempting to tear down the church that Jesus Christ promised to build. And we see that in Matthew 16, verse 18. And while Satan is an unseen enemy, he rules the earth as a divisive, oppressive, and antichrist spirit that makes himself known through people on earth.

He uses people for his own means and glory. And in this case, those who were hindering Paul were puppets of the father of lies.

Satan himself. But I want you to hear me loud and clear, church. Any impediment upon the unity of the church apart from corrupt doctrine is Satan employing his own agenda through human agents in efforts of destroying that which God is building.

He is essentially trying to delay that building project. And he's been at it for a long time, church. He uses the governments in the world to cause that impediment.

He even causes disgruntled Christians to cause that impediment and unbelievers alike. And notice, Paul didn't even have to go into great length or depth of explaining the attributes of his opponents, of who to look out for.

[21 : 05] It was simply, they were not in the unity for the church, which in turn made them servants of Satan. In essence, they were not for the unity of the church, prohibiting Paul from returning.

And I would imagine that the religious opponents against Paul probably hindered, maybe in the name of God or righteousness. We know that, you know, Paul did, was in the synagogues debating for the faith.

It was probably the religious elite that were probably in the name of God or in the name of righteousness. We cannot let you back into this city, Paul.

We cannot. However, the Bible tells us a thing or two about using the Lord's name in vain, right? Harsh, yes. But truth is harsh.

Unity of the church is to be guarded by those charged to oversee. The unity of the church is often an expression of obedience to the word of God and the love of God as overseers unite God's people.

[22 : 09] And for that, we must be on guard against such opponents, especially when they rise up even within our own midst. And also, church, let's not be surprised at our own potential of becoming such opponents to the gospel, even within our own church.

And in context with 17, verse 17, a healthy church will be marked in relational affection, leaving no room for relational affliction.

And so, Paul comes to terms. He states the reason why the root of his affection, meaning that he cared deeply for this church.

And he also stated the root of the oppression. Now, we see in section three, titled, The Glory and Joy of God. He closes his thoughts with an uplifting illustration of the glory and joy this church meant to him.

Using more threes. You know, Paul is like the faith, hope, and love. He uses those triads of threes. He uses another one in this passage.

[23 : 19] And he uses a rhetorical question. We see in verse 19, he says, For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

Is it not you? Far from a source of flattery, Paul was indicating that through this abrupt orphaned relationship with this church, with his spiritual children, that they meant everything to him.

They meant everything to him. Every soul that he was torn apart from was Paul's hope, was Paul's joy, was Paul's crown.

You'd probably send me in for a psych evaluation if I ever told you that you are my hope, you are my joy, you are my crown. You'd be like, I can't hear what Brent's saying.

I think it's time. Right? Think about that.

[24 : 30] You are my crown, he's saying to this church. This third aspect of his words offer great insight to Paul's attitude towards the mission of God building his church.

And we too must adopt the same affection that we have for other people as well, even those we might disagree with within our church. It's interesting how he uses this word of crown being a Gentile in a Greek region, that they would understand this.

They might not understand the Exodus and Moses and everything like that, but they understand competitive Olympic sort of sport events. And the Bible speaks of eternal life similar to an athletic victory and receiving a wreath or a crown.

As we mull among the New Testament, we see back in 1 Corinthians 9 verse 25. The imperishable wreath that celebrates salvation's victory over corruption.

Looking to 2 Timothy 4 verse 8. The righteous wreath that celebrates salvation's victory over unrighteousness.

[25 : 41] Or we see 1 Peter 5 verse 4. The unfading wreath of glory that celebrates salvation's victory over defilement.

And James 1 verse 12 and Revelation 2 verse 10. The wreath of life that celebrates salvation's victory over death.

And we see the same instance here in 1 Thessalonians 2 verse 19. The wreath of exaltation which celebrates salvation's victory over Satan in verse 18.

And over mankind's persecution of believers. In this reality, this church's endurance during affliction is the source of Paul's celebration.

That is what it means, that they are his crown. This imagery is tactful. Used in Greek culture which brings to mind that prize that which you labor for.

[26 : 41] Similar to the Hellenistic athletic contest in which the victor would receive a wreath. It would be a grand ceremony of receiving your reward.

This imagery was common also in Paul's writing, this athletic performance. But church, you ought to similarly be celebrating one another.

Think about that for a moment. And similarly, be the crown of one another. Remember that you can't necessarily rip the context out of this entire passage.

Remember the source of this church's faith. And everything that all the reports that Paul was receiving and his team were receiving were because they were imitators of Paul and his team.

And in that, we should be encouraged and challenged to similarly be celebrating one another. And similarly being the crown of one another. As Paul claims that this church was his crown.

[27 : 43] His hope. His joy. Isn't this profound, church? Isn't this profound? Doesn't this change our perspective of our relationships? Some might even charge Paul with idolatry.

You might have put Paul. It would be Brennan Paul in that facility with the padded room. The Thessalonians will know plain and clear.

Paul can go on and on and on. Obviously, 1 Thessalonians is not a very big book. It's not a large book like 1 Corinthians. It's a condensed version of a lot of issues within 1 Corinthians.

But they will know plain and clear his heart. Whether it will be his second coming to Thessalonica or Jesus Christ's second coming to earth.

He is saying in this passage that the truth will be quickly to follow whichever coming comes. That his opponents can say what they want.

[28 : 47] They can slander him all they want. But he knows the truth. And God knows the truth deep within the heart. This calls to mind the time when all Christians will be judged by Jesus Christ.

This is known as the judgment seat of Christ. This is known if you want to think of Olympics. It's the Olympic awarding ceremony that is listed in Scripture.

We'll call it the Jesus Olympics. In Romans 14.10 it says, For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. And verse 12.

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. We see 2 Corinthians 5 verse 10. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

So that each of us may receive what is due to us. For the things done while in the body. Whether good or bad. During this time.

[29 : 43] Paul is calling upon the greatest witness. Upon his heart. His motives. And affection of the church. Man can say whatever. But God knows the truth.

And the truth will be revealed. Whether he gets to Thessalonica first. Or Jesus Christ himself. As we see in this chapter. Of mentioning the second coming.

This is a time. Where what Satan has distorted upon earth. As he distorts truth. All will be made clear during this heavenly reward ceremony.

This is the reality that rooted Paul in the fact that God knows his heart. And is his witness. In chapter 2 verse 4 and 5. And likewise church.

May our focus be devoted similarly. In the midst of misunderstanding. Or turmoil in this life. May we check our hearts.

- [30 : 41] Because we know that God knows our hearts. And when we come to him in prayer. How hypocritical it would be to have. A sense of division.
- In our minds. Or accusation. Or things of that nature. God knows our hearts. And one day the truth will be revealed. And we hope that reality exposes in this life.
- But even if it doesn't. Even if you go through this life. Thinking that Paul is that evil guy. That's just after the money in Thessalonica.
- Even if that's the case. We hope for that eternal reward ceremony. Where all truth will be revealed. Right? And may our striving for unity.
- Be expressed in an attitude. Of hearing the words of Jesus Christ. Well done my good and faithful servants. And church. If we are worthy. Imitators of Paul's affection.
- [31 : 40] For God's church. We must also reciprocate that affection. Within our own midst. You are the crown of one another. Let's be close.
- I hope that this challenges us. And helps us in our understanding. Of. The situations that were going on.
- Within Paul's experience. Within Thessalonica. And that we can see that. The issues at hand. Are actually no further detached. Than the issues that we experience.
- Even in our midst. So I have some few. A few closing exhortations. For you. This morning. First.
- May we be. Affectionate. For one another. And allowing that affection. To unify. Our assembly. In order to strengthen. And embolden our witness.
- [32 : 34] Of the gospel. In Youngstown, Ohio. You get that? First. May we. May we. Be affectionate. For one another. And allowing.
- That affection. To unify our assembly. To strengthen. And embolden. Our witness. Of the gospel. In Youngstown, Ohio. Number two.
- May we be blameless. Of bringing division. Upon the project. Jesus is building. If we fall short. Let us repent.
- And let us hold one another up in love. Not in hatred. And no. Not holding that noose. Releasing that noose. With one another. And remember. The most loving thing that we can do at times.
- Is church discipline. And in church discipline. It is a restorative measure. To bring that affection. To ignite that affection. Once again. Within the family.
- [33 : 31] Of God. And number three. May we be the hope. The joy. And the crown of glory. Towards one another. And when we're judged. We are confident.
- In our deep affection. And indestructible unity. When we are apart. The construction plans. Are laid out church. They're laid out. The blueprints.
- Are laid out in scripture. For God's building projects. He's building a healthy church. And how are we laboring. Towards the mark.
- Of following his commandment. We must remember. That we are. His church. We belong to him. We belong to one another. We are stewards of one another.
- We are his project. And you. Church. Are his laborer. And he is our strength. That's right. Father.
- [34 : 25] Thank you. Thank you.