



"Shaken"

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers
Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on Oct 29, 2023

- 1 Thess 3 -

1 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 2 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, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 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. 6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also [to see] you— 7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. 9 For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, 10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we [do] to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Chapter 3

As so often is the case these days, it has been a difficult week in the world at large. Maybe it's been a difficult one in your personal life also. More and more the aspects of our lives are slipping out of our control, again, both corporately as well as often individually. Our lives are being shaken. Frankly, many of us are not ready, despite the repeated scriptural warnings of such. Already, we have witnessed those who have been blown away from their positions, their service, their stance with Christ. Galatians 5:7 speaks of such saying "You were doing so well. Who stopped you from being influenced by the truth?"

Paul wrote to Timothy, one of his proteges, saying that "in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly..."

The letter to the church in Thessalonica...as we covered when we began, repeatedly comes back to the premise of the last days and the second coming of Christ. So often, such thoughts are a distant premise in the lives of many who claim the mantle of Christianity. So many of us are the embodiment of Matthew 24:37 – 39; "When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn't realize

what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.”

From inside and outside, our worlds are being shaken. It is a case of digging deeper or being blown away.

3:1-2

The churches that had begun, as well as the believers within them, seemed to be always on the mind and in the prayers of the apostle Paul. The church in Thessalonica was no exception. His love and concern for them ran deep and here in this letter we read his own words wherein we get a glimpse into the heart of the man...the *pastor* Paul.

Apparently, Paul couldn't stand not knowing for sure how they were doing, so even while he felt compelled to stay put in Athens to continue the work there, he sent Timothy back to them to check on their condition. After all, Paul was certainly aware that just because a believer starts well, doesn't mean he will finish the same way. All of us know acquaintances, friends, and perhaps family that began well but somewhere along the way they fell away, were spiritually distracted, or began to falter in times of trial, persecution, or temptation. The stats are high, even for those who once were pastors and leaders!

Paul wanted to be sure, so he sent Timothy to them for the reason of “establishing them.” The word in its original form can also be translated as “stabilize” them. Paul's work was not done just because the church was planted and some people were saved! Like myself, Paul was a pastor who sought to practice a “cradle to the grave” ministry style. He therefore wanted them to continue in the faith, and remain strong and fruitful while they did. The fact of the matter is that we must continually be taught, always growing, and always moving forward. If we attempt at any time to stop for any reason, we enter into a time of great personal danger. There are no parking lots along the Christian life journey.

Timothy would therefore come to encourage them to continue faithful in their walk. This too is a critical part of ministry and a priority for true pastor leaders. It's simply called discipleship, and it is crucial to a fruitful life and the “finishing well” that Paul was so concerned about. Therefore there comes a time when it is necessary to go check on your work of faith to be sure all is well. That is the call of God upon a pastor who is reaching out beyond his backyard.

3:3-4

“...*no one should be shaken.*” The believers in that day had to endure a lot to follow Christ. For us, it has been easier, although that is changing and the casualties are increasing. I have lost count of how many who sat in the ministerial community of *this* church alone that have abandoned their post, rejected their familial responsibilities and some even ultimately rejected Christ altogether. Their weakness was laid manifest in how easily they fell, how readily they were distracted from their path, or how quickly they compromised. Indeed life still has a way of presenting hardships and trials that have the ability to knock us down. Everyone experiences such. No one is exempt from times of testing. The “smoking gun” as to who and what we *really* are is reflected in who gets back up and keeps fighting.

The English word “tribulation” is derived from the Latin word *tribulum*, which is literally “a thing with teeth that tears.” A *tribulum* in Paul's day was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it that was used in threshing and was drawn over the corn or grain separating the wheat from the chaff. Ironically, it still serves the very same purpose! When the “tribulum”...the *tribulation* is used, it still separates the “wheat from the chaff”...at least spiritually speaking! As believers experience the “tribulum” of tribulations, they have the option to ‘fold’ and

abandon the faith and each other, or allow the trials to purify us and rid us of the chaff: the ‘junk’ in our lives that have no eternal value. The “weights” *as Paul referred to them*, that slow us down and make us tired.

The end result is really up to us. It is not an issue of how tough you are, but rather upon just how much in love you really are. As the old saying goes “you’ll never know what kind of tea you are until you are in hot water.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

Paul reminds us that when it comes to trials and testing, “we are appointed to such.” That truth has wholly been lost on our current age and culture. Not only do we reject it and refuse it, but we have come to actually believe that it will be...*should be*...the exact opposite! That my faith confession will smooth out the bumps of life and all my dreams will now come true! But the reality is there is no way to escape the results of living in a fallen world and in a sinners body! And that goes for Christian *or* pagan. Matthew 5 tells us that “...*he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.*” So the rain is going to come whether you want it to or think you are immune! Your only choice is whether you go through it alone or with God...

3:5

It’s been said that “The church popular is the church polluted. The church persecuted is the church purified.” Certainly, we don’t in our flesh care for that truth. We would much prefer to be accepted and embraced and moreover many of us demand it! Yet Paul never was widely received, nor was Jesus Christ Himself!

Remember that Christ had warned Paul from the very beginning as to what was coming: “Welcome this man,” the Lord told Ananias concerning Paul, “for I’m going to show him he must suffer greatly for the sake of the kingdom” (Acts 9:16).

John 15:18-20 *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."*

A. W. Tozer once rightly said, “Before God can use a person greatly, He must allow that person to be hurt deeply.”

Because Paul realized all of this truth...all of these facts, he was compelled to send Timothy to find out where they stood. After all, he personally knew just how unrelenting Satan could be! It’s been said that “The Devil will take advantage of your vulnerability. He knows about your history. He knows where he can stick it to you.” (Richardson)

2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15 *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers*

also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

Notice that Paul loved them enough to actually **labor** for them. He was willing to put himself out there and to actually break a sweat. To sacrifice for them and place them before himself...which is certainly a lost art form in 2023! Moreover, this was not merely a heart issue or a mental concern for Paul. He put real action behind his love for Christ and for them. Seldom will anything separate the poser from the genuine article to a greater degree. And time always manifests where you stand on this issue.

3:6-7

Timothy had returned with good news on the believers in Thessonica. The believers were standing strong! In fact, they were more than just standing, they were exercising their faith and love. They were *thriving*... Moreover, they also had not forgotten Paul and the boys. They longed to see them again, just as Paul desired to see them! Their faith...*as we have been discussing over the past couple of weeks*, was more than just about themselves and their own little worlds. It was also about lateral love and a horizontal relationship with those who were their brothers and sisters.

Despite all the trials and difficulties that Paul was personally facing...*remember, he was in jail*, he was encouraged and strengthened because of them. That's the way the body of Christ is to operate. We need each other, even though we are tempted to think we don't. And it will be in the times of greatest stress and testing...times when our world, *individually and corporately*, is "shaken," that we will find out just how deep our love runs. Will we rise to the occasion and *lean in*? Or will we "cut and run?"

"Faith speaks of their characteristic attitude Godward, while love is their characteristic attitude manward. Their faith had its most significant exhibition in love toward others, especially their Christian brethren. If their faith separated them from the world, their love united them more closely to each other. The two terms summarize their religious and ethical excellence. The two must always go together. Paul's formula 'faith working through love' (Gal 5:6) expresses the intimate relationship between the two qualities." (Hiebert)

3:8

Whenever we come across an "if" as we do in this verse, we need to clearly understand what is being said, because the outcome is clearly contingent upon a particular action on our part.

Paul isn't speaking here about death in terms of the cessation of life. We know...*at least for a period of time*, that one may fail to stand fast in the Lord and he or she may very well remain alive. Paul is talking more about a "quality of living" than death on the natural plane. This is made much clearer when you see it presented in some other versions like the NASB that includes the word "really" before the word "live." We "really live" when we stand fast in the Lord. Many of you can testify to that great truth just as Paul does!

Paul, with an aspect of autobiographical confession, goes so far to say that **he** really lives knowing that they are standing fast in Lord! That's the heart of a pastor! Spurgeon wrote that "Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge."

The present tense expresses Paul's desire that his spiritual children continue firmly committed in their Christian belief. Remember, that belief always demonstrates itself to be genuine by one's conduct or lifestyle. Many of us have been churchied long enough to talk the talk and wear the religious façade. But sooner or later our actions and interactions with others show our true hand.

Scripture has a lot to say about how to remain rooted and strong. In 1 Corinthians Paul later exhorted the believers to “*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*” (1Cor 16:13) He wrote also to the church in Galatia “*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*” (Gal 5:1) And to the Ephesians he wrote “*be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil...take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with the truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace...in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.*” (Eph 6:10-18)

3:9-10

Paul almost seems that he was without words here. That, *we know*, was a rarity when it came to Paul! But words apparently failed him when it came to his heart towards God concerning the believers in Thessalonica. This ‘thanks’ which Paul embraces is intrinsically a crucial part of our worship. Most of us just come to God with our needs and wants, and rarely stop to be thankful for what we already have and what He already gave us! How much has our Creator already done for us, and when was the last time you paused and took real stock? Because a thankful heart is key to remain standing when the world is shaking...

Paul does indeed have a request here also. It was not for comfort, ease, or material gain. It was that he would be able to see the believers once again, and that he would be able to continue to minister to them and be a part of their maturing in Christ. Paul’s true faith seemed to always play out in his concern for others. He was a man completely invested...

3:11-13

The key words in this passage, as we round out the chapter is “increase and abound.” How often we think we are doing pretty good. We, after all, have come quite a way in this Jesus thing! We get to such a point and then start thinking there is room to ‘fudge’ a little...maybe push this grace thing out there a little...just cut ourselves a little slack...just engage in worldliness a little bit while keeping our eye on the door...

But such thinking never comes to any good. It never draws us closer to Christ. It never helps us glorify Him or His kingdom. And it will always inevitably result in pain and discord. Such thinking only finds us far from home, and it can eventually find us alone, separated from the body of Christ, and maybe eventually dead. That’s where that road can take you.

If you truly desire to stand in Christ unmovable, then you have to stay in thankful and firmly engaged. We must forever be “increasing.” Forever “abounding.” We have to keep our eyes on the goal, not on this world. Not just in our love toward God, but in our love toward each other. Someone has paraphrased this prayer as follows: “(May) The Lord enable you more and more to spend your lives in the interests of others, in order that He may so establish you in Christian character now, that you might be vindicated from every charge that might possibly be brought against you ...