Grace to You :: Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

The Pastor's Heart, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4

Code: 52-10

We turn now in our Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 for our study of God's Word this morning. Those of you who have been in this study with us, faithfully attending on the Lord's day, as you should, know that Paul has been telling us a lot about his own ministry, as he begins this wonderful epistle. His focus has been on the quality and the character of his own ministry. That is no different as we approach chapter 3. In fact, as I was reading through this chapter and contemplating it, it was very clear to me that if we were going to give a title to this particular chapter, we would call it "The Pastor's Heart...The Pastor's heart."

In this marvelous text, the Holy Spirit provides us with a spiritual X-ray of a pastor's heart, namely Paul...the model for all who shepherd God's people. Now let me be a little more specific about that. This chapter does not tell us what a pastor does. This does not tell us what a pastor says. This chapter does not tell us what a pastor is. This chapter tells us what a pastor feels. It takes us deep into his heart.

Now remember, the full story of what was going on in Thessalonica is unknown to us, as it was to Paul. But there is at least this much known, that after his leaving some detractors had come and begun to attack his integrity. And so as he writes back to the Thessalonians, he initially in this letter, for the record, lays down some elements about his own life and ministry to establish his integrity. It is not just to fulfill that historical issue of establishing his integrity but also to lay down for us by the inspiration of the Spirit of God a pattern for pastoral integrity.

Every one who serves in the role of pastor, elder, overseer, everyone who serves in spiritual leadership must deal with the issue of what a pastor does, what a pastor says, what a pastor is and what a pastor feels. That's the sum of integrity. All of those are important issues. And, in fact, the matter of what a pastor does, he has already referred to in the first two chapters. The matter of what a pastor says, he has already reminded them of. And the matter of what a pastor is, he has laid out in chapter 2 very clearly.

But now as he comes to chapter 3, he is concerned about what he feels. Now they already know what he feels because Timothy has already arrived and told them, but this is an affirmation for the record. And not only for the record of the Thessalonians, but for the record of the Word of God so that we all might know what a pastor feels. You know, they say if you want to really know someone, you have to know what they feel. It's not enough to know what they do and what they say, and it

might not even be enough to know what they are in terms of the character of their function, you must know what's inside. And so here we go inside the Apostle Paul. We see his heart.

Some of it has already been leaked to us a little bit. Back in chapter 1 verse 2 we found out that he was thankful. He felt great thanks to God for the Thessalonians. In verse 3 of chapter 1 we found that he had a good feeling in his heart about their work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. So he not only was thankful in his feelings but he was also hopeful, he was encouraged because of what he had heard.

And then in chapter 2 and verse 13 we note again that he constantly thanked God about their response to the Word of God. Then down in verses 17 to 20 it was clear that he had great desire to be with them. They were his hope. They were his joy. They were his crown of rejoicing. So we get a little idea of how he felt. He felt thankful for them. He felt encouraged by them. And he felt joy and affection for them.

But in chapter 3 it becomes much more focused, much more specific and much more clear. Let's read the first ten verses of chapter 3 and start to look into Paul's heart. "Therefore, when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone. 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 so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction and so it came to pass, as you know. For this reason when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith for fear that the tempter might have tempted you and our labor should be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us good news of your faith and love and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction, we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live if you stand firm in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to the Lord for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account? As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face and may complete what is lacking in your faith."

There you have it, an X-ray into the heart of the Apostle Paul. It's going to take us two weeks to go through this to really discern it. Reading this X-ray at first glance, might look difficult but it really isn't and you'll see clearly as we flow through these wonderful verses.

Now let me just say this as well. There is a lot of basic, historical, circumstantial data that we have to understand to grasp this. But apart from that, we can't really feel what the Spirit of God wants to communicate. And so I trust that you'll be attentive as we share some of the behind-the-scenes things that are going to make this passage much more vital to us.

By way of a note, the chapter begins with the word "therefore," which in some ways, I guess, is a bit unfortunate. Perhaps it would be better if there was no chapter division here at all and then we would make a much more obvious connection with the previous statement. At the end of chapter 2, verse 20, he says, "For you are our glory and joy, therefore..." In other words, it's because of how we feel about you that we feel this way. So as we move into his heart, we have to begin that move from the closing section of chapter 2 and the word "therefore" gives us the connecting flow. "Because you are my present joy, and because you are my eternal joy, therefore," this is how I feel.

Now though the circumstances of Paul and the Thessalonians are unique as far as pastor and people go because there's a forced separation. In no way does that minimize his pastor's heart. In fact, it probably maximizes it. He probably feels more intense in the separation than he might have felt in the proximity. So we don't really lose anything here because they're separated, rather we may gain something.

Paul wants them to know that he's no fake, as has been suggested to them. He is no charlatan. He is no self-seeking false teacher. He's not trying to line his pockets. He's not trying to build his kingdom...not at all. He is not trying to seek his own fortune at their expense. He's not trying to accumulate a following for his own self-glory. He is a true pastor. He already told them he could tell it by what he did, they could tell it by what he said, they could tell it by what he was, and now he's saying you can tell it by what I feel for you. And now we're really getting in touch with it because what a man feels is the purest, true part of him. So we have here a rich glimpse into the marvelous greatness, virtue and true spirituality of an exemplary pastor.

Several elements are characteristic of a pastor's heart. Element number one is affection for his people...affection for his people...affection for his people. Verse 1, "Therefore when we could endure it no longer we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone and we sent Timothy." Just the beginning phrase, "Therefore when we could endure it no longer," this is indicative of how he felt about them. He couldn't stand the separation. He couldn't tolerate their being in one place and he being in another and no communication between the two. And I guess it really has to start with this. If that which is to be truest about believers is that they love one another, then that which must be true about the pastor is that he loves his people, else how can he demonstrate to them that which should be most true about them?

And so, we would assume then that the pastor's heart, first of all, would be marked by affection for his people. That is basic. And that affection, though not stated as such here, is manifest in what he is feeling. He was feeling pain, to put it simply. He was feeling intense pain due to the separation from them. Back in verse 17 of chapter 2 he had said that even though they were only apart for a short time, he was very eager with a great desire to see them and more than once had wanted to come to them but Satan had hindered him. Paul was feeling very deeply the separation, he wanted to be with

his people. He had a strong affection for them. Though they were new friends in Christ, they had become dear friends. He had so much affection that the load he was carrying, the load of ignorance about their condition was weighing him down.

Why was he concerned? Because he knew they were under persecution. He also knew they were only a few months old in the Lord, they were just a baby church. He also knew they had no mature leadership. And though he was having his own trials, which we shall see later in the chapter, and enduring his own difficulties and hostilities, he was much less concerned about himself than he was about his beloved children in the faith and that demonstrates his affection. He even repeats this very affectionate statement over in verse 5, "For this reason when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith." Twice he says in this chapter, "I couldn't endure it, I couldn't bear it, I couldn't handle it. It was too much pressure, I had to find a relief valve somewhere and let the pressure off and the only way to do that was to send somebody to find out about your condition and get a report back."

Now again, we must recognize that his affection for his people is not an emotional sentiment. Sure there's emotion in it and there's not a thing wrong with that, but it is not merely simply an emotional sentiment with a desire to socialize. It is a strong compulsion to nurture and to protect and to perfect believers facing very serious difficulty, distress in their spiritual infancy. It was more than just a desire for fellowship, it was a desire to fulfill the call of God in their life and bring them to spiritual maturity. In fact, he knew that once he and Timothy and Silas who were all there in Thessalonica together had left, that the persecution wouldn't end, it was the persecution that really kind of moved them out and he knew it wouldn't end, it would only intensify against that baby church, only a few months old in the Lord. And thus he was carrying a very heavy burden. And you remember, he too had been banned from the city and one man had offered himself as security, as a bond against him ever returning and two, he had been hindered by Satan, which may have encompassed that banning as well. But he couldn't bear not knowing their condition, he couldn't bear not knowing about them and that is because he had affection for his people.

Beloved, that is very basic. You need to know that that's a responsibility your pastor has to bear in his heart and while this message, you say, may be directed at the pastor, it's also directed at you to make sure that the pastor is faithful to demonstrate that affection. There's so much in the New Testament written to spiritual leaders that no matter what epistle of Paul we read and study, we find that he spends, it seems, great portions of the text talking about what the servant of the Lord is supposed to do. That is because leadership is so crucial in the church and also because the people need to hold leadership to the standard that God has laid down. A true pastor with a pastor's heart isn't concerned about his own success, he isn't concerned about his own reputation, he isn't concerned about his own trials, he is deeply concerned about the people who are the object of his affection. And that was Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 2:13, this is a very interesting statement, to understand it we back up to verse 12, "When I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened to me in the Lord." Now Paul says I came to the city of Troas and a door was opened to me, I had come there to preach the gospel, the door was wide open. You say, "Boy, that's great, he'll go through it and preach." But verse 13 says, "I had no rest for my spirit." I couldn't settle down there. I couldn't find any peace. Why? "I couldn't find Titus, my brother. But taking my leave of them I went on to Macedonia." He walked right in to Troas, wide open door to preach the gospel. He was so burdened about Titus he said, "I can't stay, I have no peace," and he started back toward Macedonia on the Egnatian Highway, hoping along the road to bump in to Titus, not even knowing where he was, so concerned was he about Titus' spiritual situation. That's affection...that's the heart of the pastor. And when weeks had passed with no news about Titus, he was burdened for his beloved friend.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verses 28 and 29, we get another glimpse into this particular kind of affection, as he has been discussing in the previous verses all of the things he endured in his ministry...he was beaten and lashed and he was shipwrecked and stoned and all the other perils and dangers and things he went through including sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, without food, in the cold, exposure, all of that. Then he comes to verse 28 and says, "On top of that, all of that stuff, apart from such external things there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches." It wasn't the pressure of administrative duty, it was the pressure of concern. He cared because he loved his people, he had affection for his people. And that was a burden on his heart. He couldn't get rid of it.

Then he defines it a little further in verse 29. "Who is weak without my being weak?" In other words, when I look at people in the church who are weak, I feel weak, empathy, sympathy. That's affection. Then he says in verse 29, "Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" Moral issues, doctrinal issues, issues about weak Christians, personal disputes, persecution, all of that was unrelenting daily pressure on his heart. It never went away. When Paul saw false teachers beguiling believers in the path of truth and when he heard of sinful offenses committed by believers against the body, and when he came aware of Satan's harassment through persecution...as one writer put it...his love glowed through righteous wrath. It was a passionate concern because of his affection. Who is offended...he says...and I'm not feeling it? Who is weak and I don't feel the weakness? Whose faith is wounded and I don't feel the pain? That is affection, that is deep affection. You know you love somebody when you feel the pain, right? This is a man of affection and, listen, this is essential to the pastorate. It's more than sentiment, it is passionate zeal for spiritual welfare...passionate zeal for spiritual welfare. This is what we're all about. That is why if people don't respond properly in the church, you have such a burden, Hebrews 13:17 says, if the people don't cooperate, you will do your work with grief. Why? Because you will grieve over their lack of response because you care, because you care.

A true pastor is not an empire builder. A true pastor is a man who loves deeply. Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12:15, "Even if you love me less when I love you more, I'll keep on loving you." What is it then that shows the pastor's heart? We talk about that, don't we? Oh, So-and-so has a pastor's heart, he has a pastor's heart. What we mean by that initially is he has affection for his people. He really cares about his people. And he bears a heavy, heavy burden of concern about his people. And that is a weight that sometimes you can't endure and Paul is saying...it's too heavy, I can no longer bear it, I have to find out your condition.

Going a significantly higher step than Paul we can say the perfect illustration of this is Jesus. In John 10:14 and 15 Jesus said, "I know My sheep, My sheep know Me and I lay down My life for My sheep." That's affection. We know He loves us. He loves the sheep of His own fold. The perfect example of affection as a shepherd is Jesus Christ. The human model for us is Paul. We are responsible as pastors and elders and overseers and spiritual leaders to have affection for our people and to be burdened and concerned about their particular spiritual needs. That is why any of you young men thinking about going into ministry, you might as well settle in your heart right now that this is...this is an all-the-time responsibility because even when you're not functioning in some ministerial duty, even when you're not teaching or preaching some message, you are carrying around the unceasing, unrelenting pressure of the concern for your people. That is part of the burden of ministry. The positive side of affection is that when you love, love is a positive feeling. It can be devastated, it can be hurt, it can be wounded, it leaves you open to great vulnerability, but at the same time where there is response, there is great joy. Jesus loved His sheep, Paul loved his people, so must we.

Right on the heels of that comes a second element of a pastor's heart, if we're to define a pastor's heart, the second element would be unselfishness toward his people...unselfishness. Obviously that would flow out of his affection and we see it with Paul. And looking at our text again in chapter 3, we read that Paul said, "When we could endure it no longer because of affection, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ."

Now here Paul sort of gives some feet to his affection and he unselfishly sends Timothy. Strong affection will always lead to unselfishness. You can always tell if somebody cares about you by what they'll sacrifice to meet your need, right? Simple principle. So using the word "we" here in a singular sense, when he says, "When we could endure it no longer, we thought it best...and we sent Timothy," he's really just referring to himself. It's kind of a singular use of "we" which is not uncommon, you might even say that, "Well, we're planning to go here," and you really mean yourself. The reason we say it has to be singular is because he says, "We thought it best to be left alone at Athens," so he's really referring to himself as being alone. We sent Timothy.

You say, "Well maybe that didn't leave him alone, maybe that left Silas there." Well, Silas was with him but it would be a terrible slur against Silas to say "we sent Timothy and only Silas is left so I'm all alone." I mean, I don't think Silas would take too kindly to that. And he was a very treasured friend. So we can very well understand that Silas must have been gone also and all we have to do is read Acts 18 to find out that indeed he was gone, Paul had sent him to Macedonia...to Philippi in Macedonia. And so Paul was alone. And he says, "It was best, I resolved, I willingly determined to do it because I considered it to be the best thing." Best for who? Not me, not me, I was in Athens, Athens is a place of skeptical, cynical philosophers and Christ rejecters. I needed some help. There was a great opportunity and there was a great ministry to be accomplished, but we thought it best to be left alone. And so, sent Timothy to you, sent Silas to the Philippian Christians and I was alone. That little verb "to be left behind," means to be abandoned or forsaken and is used in secular usages of leaving one's loved ones behind at death. So it's a serious kind of separation.

Now let me give you just a quick little bit of background so you get a feel for this, just in a few minutes. Paul and Silas and Timothy had come to Thessalonica in Acts 17. They had preached there in the synagogue for three Sabbaths and then done some work among the Gentiles and established a church. Paul, Silas, Timothy then left Thessalonica. They left. Paul then left Silas and Timothy at Berea, left them there to carry on a work. And in Acts 17 it says he went to Athens by himself. So Paul went to Athens all alone. Later it is obvious that Silas and Timothy came back and rejoined Paul at Athens because Paul here says he was left at Athens alone because he sent Timothy away. And as I noted for you, Silas also was sent to Macedonia. So they were left in Berea for a time. Paul was alone in Athens for a while. Then they came and joined him in Athens. Not long after that, we don't have any time frame on this, according to verse 2, Timothy was then sent to Thessalonica, according to Acts 18:5. Silas was sent to Philippi and Paul was again alone in Athens.

Now when he's writing this he's in Corinth. He stayed in Athens for a while then he went to Corinth. When he got to Corinth, Timothy came back to him and Silas came back to him. So they were all rejoined in Corinth and it was after Timothy had come back there that he wrote this letter because now he had the information he wanted and he could write back and say how thankful he was about the good report from Timothy and he could also record some of these things about the integrity of his life, what he did, what he said, what he was and what he felt for the record. But as he writes in chapter 3, he reminds them of the time when he was in Athens and sent Timothy to them and was left alone.

Now the point of all of that is simply to say, here was a man who made a significant sacrifice because he cared. This is unselfishness. And it's very obvious. To be alone in a pagan society, to be alone to try to confront the intellectual capital of the world with all of its cynicism is a very difficult task. But his affection for the Christians at Thessalonica was so strong that he was willing to sacrifice personal companionship and comfort for their sakes. For the good of his people he would be alone in the hardest place. And, of course, if you know anything about Paul and you read through the New

Testament, there is a warm pathos that shows up again and again and again as he affectionately talks about his Christian companions, how precious they are to him, how much they mean to him, how he longs to be with them, or to have them come and be with him.

It wasn't easy for him to be dispossessed of his precious friends. But that kind of sacrifice marks the pastor's heart. For the sake of someone else, he would gladly give up the best that he has. In this case it was Timothy. First Corinthians chapter 4, he was so concerned about the Corinthian church he said, "I'm going to send you Timothy. I'm going to send him to you." To the Philippian church, chapter 2 he says in verse 19, "I hope to send Timothy to you." In verse 20 he says, "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare." He dispatched Timothy a lot of places. It wasn't easy to let him go, but it was necessary and Timothy was his best and he gave his best. That's what sacrifice is all about, it's all about giving your best.

Paul didn't have any worthy goods, he didn't have any worth value in terms of economics, monetary value. What he did have and what was so precious to him were his friends. I can understand that life would be extremely lonely and threatening for him. And the presence of friends was the best that he had. And when he gave it, he showed you the unselfishness of his heart.

Silas off to Macedonia, there were needs there. Timothy off to Thessalonica. So verse 2, "We sent Timothy," notice how he speaks, he can't even say his name without words of affection following, "Our brother...our brother," there's warmth in that. There's some passion in that. Camaraderie through heavy trials tends to make real brothers. Timothy certainly was a brother by grace, by just being a fellow Christian in Christ, but he was a brother by experience through the trials that he endured with Paul.

And then he calls him "God's fellow worker," many manuscripts say, "God's servant." It's almost a toss up, very hard to make a decision. God's servant, diakonos, would mean God's servant, God's minister, and surely he was that. The word here in some manuscripts is sunergon, God's fellow worker, God's fellow doer. He was both God's minister or God's servant and God's fellow worker. and so he commends Timothy not only for his relationship to himself as his brother but for his relationship to God as God's fellow worker, God's servant, if you will, either one. During their 20-year relationship the Apostle had discipled Timothy and all during that 20-year relationship, that young man, Timothy, was the man to whom Paul would give his mantle. And from the very beginning Paul trusted him. This, by the way, was Paul's missionary trip, still in progress, the first trip Timothy ever took with him. He's brand new. He joined Paul in Acts 16. In Acts 17 they're in Thessalonica. So Timothy is pretty new. Yet the deep trust had developed, a deep confidence, a settled confidence. Paul really believed in this young man and he sent him to the very difficult places.

During those years of relationship he never lost that trust. And as Timothy was floundering a little bit at the end, he had to write 1 and 2 Timothy to really strengthen him, just before his own death so

Timothy would carry on the work. But from the start he trusted him and he respected him. And he said, "He's our brother and God's fellow worker," I love this, "in the gospel of Christ." He's involved in extending the gospel. He's involved in the salvation message. Three times in chapter 2 the gospel is called the gospel of God, now it's called the gospel of Christ, same gospel. God is source, Christ is subject, right? God is source, Christ is subject. Same gospel, the good news of salvation provided by God in Christ.

So he sent Timothy, the best, the very best, gave his best gift, his dearest friend, his companion, though it meant hardship, personal loneliness and exposure for him. Truly a good reminder, good lesson for me. You spend your time discipling men and some day you think maybe you'll pass the mantle on to them, but God begins to move and all of a sudden you have to let them go. Somewhere else calls and you have to send your best. We've been doing that for many years. It's hard to do that, to let some of the best men go. It's wonderful that God lets you keep some but you have to send some where they're needed and you can't be selfish, you have to be unselfish.

I was talking to a young man this week who is working on a church staff. He said, "I've got to preach." He said, "I just have to preach, it's just burning in my heart." He said, "I'm ready to preach."

I said, "Well do you have opportunity?"

He said, "Yes, I have a church that's given me a call, they want to come and be the pastor." And he said, "I'm ready to go." He said, "I preached there a week ago and God moved in a mighty way, we had a tremendous time. I want to go."

And I said, "Well, have you talked to the pastor?"

He said, "Yes, I went to the pastor and he said no, he needs me too much to let me go."

I said, "What do you do?"

He said, "I work on administration and finance." He said, "What do you think I ought to do?"

I said, "I think you ought to make another trip to the pastor. If you feel God's called you to preach, you better go. And however good you are and however important you are, he's got to be willing to be unselfish because the need is great in another place and the call of God is on your life." That is hard to do, but that's what needs to be done.

The true shepherd will give his best. And Paul was that way. That's unselfishness. Whatever it is that we have if we function with a pastor's heart, we gladly give it to meet the need of the people for whom we have affection. Certainly Christ, God in Christ is the model for that, the perfect model, higher than Paul. God gave us the best gift, even Jesus Christ. Christ gave us the best gift, even His

own life. And then He gave us the best gift, even the Spirit of God to live within us. God made an unbelievable sacrifice in giving Christ. Christ made an unbelievable sacrifice in dying for us. And the Holy Spirit, I think, made a great sacrifice in agreeing to live within us.

So what is it that marks the heart of a pastor? When you say somebody has a pastor's heart, what do you mean? Affection for the people, unselfishness toward the people. Let me give you a third point this morning, we'll finish the rest next time. Compassion for the people...compassion for his people. This flows out of that affection and that unselfishness. And when I say compassion I'm not using that word in a very general sense but in a rather specific sense. It means to suffer with. And that's exactly the sense in which I mean it.

The pastor's heart feels the heart of his people. We find that in verse 2, let's look at it. Timothy was sent, and here's the reason, "To strengthen and encourage you as to your faith." To strengthen and encourage you as to your faith. Now the Thessalonian Christians were good. In fact, chapter 1 outlines how really noble they were. We went through that in great detail. They had heard the Word, and applied it. They had become imitators of the Apostle and his companions and the Lord. They had endured some persecution. They had turned to God from idols. They were waiting for the Second Coming. They were really a noble bunch. But they were still a baby church. They were still young in the faith. They still needed nurturing and growth. And he says, "I'm sending Timothy for the express purpose of strengthening and encouraging you as to your faith.

Chapter 3 verse 13 shows up in his prayers, this same kind of attitude. He's praying that God may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness. Over in chapter 4 verse 1 he says, "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that as you receive from us instruction as how you ought to walk and please God just as you actually do walk, that you may excel still more." You're doing it but you need to do it more. Verse 10, end of the verse, "We urge you, brethren, excel still more." He says...I want Timothy to come and strengthen and encourage you to do more of what you're doing, to grow stronger.

This was Timothy's task. And certainly he had seen it modeled by Paul. You notice those two words "strengthen and encourage," very simply let me tell you what they mean. The word "strengthen" means to support or establish, it's the idea of buttressing something, to support it. In other words, I want your faith in God to be strong, to be established, to be firm, to be solid, to be unwavering. And then I want to encourage you to apply what you know. I want to strengthen the foundation of your faith and I want to encourage you to apply it.

Now he's not saying "I want to strengthen and encourage you in any other specific," than in your faith. You say, "Well does he sort of reduce it to that?" Because listen, folks, it's very simple. If you are strong in your faith in God and Christ, then you have a foundation by which you can live your life. If you are weak in that, it's hard to apply it. But once that foundation is strong and you're firm, you can

be encouraged to apply what you know.

Let me say it another way. What you believe about God and what you believe about Christ are the key to how you live. The stronger my knowledge of God and Christ, the stronger my trust in them, right? The more I know about God through His revelation, the more I know about Christ, the more that is deeply imbedded in my heart, the stronger, more resolute and unwavering my confidence in Him will be. And then I can be encouraged to make application of those things I know. But if I don't know too much about God, then I don't know enough to trust Him in every issue. If I don't know that much about Christ, then I can get knocked all over the place when somebody attacks me because I don't know that much, my faith is vacillating.

Paul is saying, "I want Timothy to come and increase your capacity for trusting God and therefore encouraging you to apply God's truth." If I don't trust God, I'm going to worry about everything. And if I don't know all I need to know about God and about Christ, I don't have enough information to make application. So he says I'm going to have Timothy come.

What's Timothy going to do? How's he going to strengthen you? He's going to give you more of the Word, more of the truth, tell you about God, tell you about Christ so that you'll have confidence and trust. It's essentially what Paul prayed for the Ephesians. He said, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of His calling and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." See, if you know that about God, then you can bank your life on that. Then you can be encouraged to live in the light of it. This is basic.

Go with me for a minute to Acts 14, and this is what Paul taught Timothy by way of example. In Acts chapter 14 verse 21, "After they preached the gospel to that city, Derbe, and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and to Antioch." They went back to the places where they had been, Paul and his entourage, Barnabas went back. Now notice verse 22, what did they do when they went back? "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith." No matter whether they were going through trials or not. So, there's the same two words. Timothy was going to do in Thessalonica what Timothy had seen and heard, I should say, that Paul and Barnabas did. This was the pattern all along. Paul was the one who did this. He taught his followers to do it. Timothy certainly learned it from him, even though he wasn't in the scene here. Paul came to strengthen, that is to ground them in the truth, and then encourage them to trust God and apply the truth through the difficult times.

Go to chapter 15 and see how this consistently flows. In chapter 15 verse 32, "Judas and Silas being prophets themselves encouraged and strengthened the brethren." How did they do it? I like this, "With a lengthy message." You see how spiritual that is? How can you strengthen and encourage someone with a lengthy message? Because the message told them about God and about Christ and

encouraged them to apply what they knew in the difficult situation.

Chapter 15 verse 41, "Paul and Silas traveling through Syria and Cilicia...doing what?...strengthening the churches." Chapter 18 verse 23, "He departed and passed successfully through the Galatian region in Phrygia," and what was he doing? "Strengthening all the disciples." That's...that's what he did. He strengthened. He wrote to the Romans in chapter 1 verse 11, "I want to come to you and I want to impart some spiritual gift to you that you might be strengthened," Romans 1:11, "Or you might be established or firmly grounded." That was really his heart. He wanted Timothy to go back and make sure they stood strong.

In 2 Thessalonians when Paul wrote to them the second time, he said, "My prayer is that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace will comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word." He wanted strong believers. Chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians he said, "I know the Lord is faithful and He'll strengthen and protect you from the evil one." See, that's pastoral care, to strengthen people.

You say, "What's your concern?" My concern is that you be strong in your knowledge, that you understand God, you understand Christ, you understand the truth of both and that you then go to live your life, face your trials, face your difficulties in the strength of that understanding. That's the only way you can live life. Better knowledge of the Word, better knowledge of God, better knowledge of Christ, greater understanding produces greater confidence and allows you to be encouraged through your trials by leaning on the ones you know and the ones you trust.

Now why did he fell this so deeply? Verse 3, why did he feel it so deeply? He says it, "So that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions." I don't want you to be disturbed by these afflictions. "For you yourselves know that we have been destined for this." He says, "I know what you're going through. My heard aches...this is compassion, this is where the compassion comes...I feel your pain." Who hurts and I don't feel the pain? That's what he said in 2 Corinthians 11:29, "I feel it, I identify with you, I don't want anybody to be disturbed." That is a very interesting verb, <a href="sino">sino</a>(??), it means to wag and it was used of a dog wagging his tail. I don't want any of you going through this, being...going back and forth, and back and forth. In fact, it had a kind of an interesting possible meaning as well, it came to mean to allure, to fascinate, flatter or beguile. You say, "How does that connect with a dog wagging his tail?" Well, because when a dog comes up and wags his tail it is usually trying to draw attention to itself because it wants something. And the word sort of went through an etymology and finally meant to allure, to fascinate, to flatter, to beguile. I don't want anybody either to knock you around and I don't want anybody to fascinate, beguile or allure you away from the truth. So either meaning could have been in Paul's mind, it's difficult to know which.

Now what's going to cause that? What's going to cause them to waver or to be allured away from truth? He says, "These afflictions...these pressures...these tests of faith." They can do that. I don't

want that to happen. So I've got to get Timothy there to get you strong. And he says, "I know they're coming, for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this." How did they know? "For indeed when we were with you we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction and so it came to pass, as you know." It was inevitable that it was going to come, we told you it was going to come, but when it comes I don't want you to start moving around and being beguiled. I want you to stay strong and firm and true so I'm sending Timothy to do that. And he was already feeling their pain and their pressure and their tribulation and identifying with it.

That phrase "you yourselves know that we have been destined for this," boy, we ought to really camp on that today. You can say to someone when you're leading them to Christ, "By the way, you're not only destined for eternal glory, you're destined for temporal trouble." That's right. There is no health, wealth, prosperity gospel being preached here. Paul is not saying Jesus is the answer to all of your problems. He is saying Jesus is the path to some new ones. When you give your life to Jesus Christ, you are promised eternal peace and temporal trouble. It's guaranteed, it's built in. "All that will live godly in this present age will suffer persecution." Expect it, that's how it is. We're called to this. Peter says, "After you've suffered a while the Lord will make you perfect." James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into these trials because God is using them to perfect you." Paul says, "All these things that happen to you work together for good." And he says, "No matter what comes against you, life, death, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, nothing is going to ultimately move you from the love of God." But the other side of it is, get ready cause it's all going to come. It's all going to come. You are destined for trouble. Jesus said, "That they treated Me this way, do you think they'll treat you any different?" "In this world you shall have...what?...tribulation, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." In other words, you're going to have temporal trouble, look ahead to eternal glory.

You yourselves know, he says, you know we've been destined...this tells me that when Paul went there and preached the gospel, he preached a gospel of eternal peace and temporal trouble. They knew right off the bat it was inevitable. You're appointed to it. These peoples...I would never want to be in a church that had a pastor that was in to the prosperity gospel because people are sitting there imagining that they're never to have any problems...and when they come, they're not ready for that. They're not ready for that at all. Furthermore, I would hate to be in a church with that kind of a pastor because I would feel that if I had problems, he would have very little sympathy with me and see me as some kind of an aberration. No kind of compassion am I going to get out of a pastor who thinks that everybody ought to be trouble free. What's wrong with you, man, having trouble?

One writer says, "If a person knows that something unpleasant is part of his destiny, something that is inevitable, then he'll brace himself to move it." Obviously. "And not think that it's a sign that he's on the wrong track and taken by surprise by it." You preach that stuff to people that Jesus will make you trouble free and then they have trouble and they're going to question whether Jesus can do anything. They're going to question their conversion. Confusion is

endless because whether they preach a prosperity gospel or not, people are going to have trouble. They can preach it all they want, it won't change anything, it isn't reality. People are going to have trouble. Now you might as well be told, folks, you come to Christ, you're going to have trouble, lots of trouble cause you're living in a fallen world and you're a fallen person. And not only that, you have enough trouble just being fallen in a fallen world, now you're going to have trouble from the other fallen people in the fallen world who don't like what you claim in Christ. So you're going to have a different kind of trouble, a new kind of trouble.

But be of good cheer because what you have that they don't have is you know it's temporary. You know it's temporary. And this was so fundamental, he says, "Look...verse 4...when we were with you we kept telling you in advance." We were predicting it, "That you were going to suffer affliction." You were going to be put under pressure. You knew it, we told you. But even though we told you, I also know you've got to be strong to deal with it.

Sometimes I wonder what people think a pastor is supposed to do. Some people think he's supposed to entertain them. What a pastor is supposed to do is help you to get your faith so strong that when you go through trouble you can be encouraged to apply your faith. That's a pastor's responsibility. That's a pastor's heart. And in order to do that, you have to care about that. And Paul had compassion. He felt their pain, he hurt when they hurt, he was weak when they were weak. When they sinned he felt the pain.

Trouble...that's inevitable. That's the way it is in this world. Jesus said it, didn't He? Let's go a step above Paul and look at an even better model, Jesus said, "Blessed are you when all men revile you, persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake." Jesus said in Matthew chapter 10, "You can expect that the pupil will be like his teacher, the servant will be like his master." Implication, if they treat the master one way, they'll treat the servant the same way. Expect it. Jesus gave us that pattern and He was so compassionate because He understood the trouble. Give me a pastor who expects the Christian life is going to have pain and sorrow and difficulty and trouble, because then I'll have the compassion that the pastor is supposed to have. Deliver me, Lord, from ever being under somebody who thinks life ought to be without trouble.

What is a pastor's heart? The pastor's heart is a heart that has affection for his people, the heart that is unselfish toward his people, a heart that has compassion for the trouble of his people. All that moved Paul to do what he did. Now you're getting in touch with his feelings. Now there's much more.

Father, thank You this morning that You've given us this X-ray and this view of the things that Paul felt down in his heart. Thank You for how instructive they are to me, how convicting they are to me. And how helpful they are to all of us who we might understand what it is expected of those who are in spiritual leadership, every pastor, every elder, every shepherd of the sheep is called upon to manifest

this kind of heart. May we not be content with what we do, may we not be content with what we say, may we not just thrive on what we are to the ministry, but may we be very deeply concerned about the things we feel. Give to us a heart of affection, unselfish and compassionate that we might be the kind of shepherd we ought to be, that we might have the sheep we ought to have. Father, we're reminded of Jeremiah 3:15 where You said, "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart who will feed you on knowledge and understanding." That's a true shepherd, that's a shepherd after Your own heart. Give us again those kinds of shepherds for Your church that Your name might be exalted. Amen.

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