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

The Pastor's Heart, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 3:5-10
Code: 52-11

Let's open our Bibles for the study of God's precious Word to us this morning, to 1 Thessalonians chapter 3. We come back to this third chapter which I've entitled "The Pastor's Heart," to learn again what made the Apostle Paul such an effective shepherd.

Of course this is important to me as a pastor. It cuts closely into my own heart, pushes me through some thinking and reacting that is very necessary and very helpful. But I trust also that your own heart will be blessed as we look again into the feelings of this great man of God which set a standard for every shepherd and every pastor.

Through the years, personally, I have collected all kinds of data, quotes, books, articles, treatises of many kinds, to help me understand what it is to be a pastor. Some of these I keep very close as reminders of what is expected of me. One quote that hangs on the wall of my office and has for a number of years is from a man named Charles Jefferson, a pastor, who was born in 1860. He said this, "It is by no means easy for a young man to become a shepherd, and he ought not be discouraged if he cannot become one in a day or a year. An orator he can become without difficulty. A reformer he can become at once. In criticism of politics and society, he can do a flourishing business the first Sunday. But a shepherd he can become only slowly and by patiently traveling the way of the cross."

Another pastor, Jeremy Taylor, once wrote that, "To be a faithful shepherd...quote...you must be a man of God, not after the common manner of men, but after God's own heart. And then men will strive to be like you," end quote.

The standard is high. Every time we turn to the pages of the Word of God and come across a passage that deals with a pastor, the standard is very high. And I believe it is rightly so. One writer rather dramatically and forcefully demands that one who calls himself a true pastor must follow a very rigid and very dutiful pattern of life. Listen to what he said, quote, "Make him a ministry of the Word, fling him into his office, tear the office sign from the door and nail on the sign 'Study.' Take him off the mailing list. Lock him up with his books and his typewriter and his Bible. Slam him down on his knees before texts and broken hearts and the flick of lives of a superficial flock and a holy God. Force him to be the one man in our surfeited communities who knows about God. Throw him into the ring to box with God until he learns how short his arms are. Engage him to wrestle with God all the night through. Let him come out only when he's bruised and beaten into being a blessing. Set a time

clock on him that will imprison him with thought and writing about God for many hours a week. Shut his mouth forever spouting remarks and stop his tongue forever tripping lightly over every non-essential. Require him to have something to say before he dares break the silence. Bend his knees in the lonesome valley. Fire him from the PTA and cancel his country-club membership, burn his eyes with weary study. Wreck his emotional poise with worry for God. And make him exchange his pius stance for a humble walk with God and man. Make him spend and be spent for the glory of God. Rip out his telephone...Amen, hallelujah. Burn up his ecclesiastical

success sheets. Defuse his glad hand. Put water in his gas tank. Give him a Bible and tie him to the pulpit and make him preach the Word of the living God. Test him, quiz him, exam him, humiliate him for his ignorance of things divine, shame him for his good comprehension of finances, batting averages and political in-fighting. Laugh at his frustrated effort to play psychiatrist. Form a choir and raise a chant and haunt him with it night and day. Sir, we would see Jesus. When at long last he dares to say the pulpit, ask him if he has a Word from God. If he doesn't, then dismiss him. Tell him you can read the morning paper and digest the television commentaries and think through the day's superficial problems and manage the community's weary drives and bless the sorted baked potatoes and green beans ad infinitum better than he can. Command him not to come back until he's read and reread, written and rewritten, until he can stand up, warn and forlorn, and say, 'Thus says the Lord.' Rake him across the board of his ill-gotten popularity. Smack him hard with his own prestige. Corner him with questions about God. Cover him with demands for celestial wisdom and give him no escape until he's back against the wall of the Word. Sit down before him and listen to the only word he has left, God's Word. Let him be totally ignorant of the down-street gossip, but give him a chapter and order him to walk around it, camp on it, sup with it and come at last to speak it backward and forward until all he says about it rings with the truth of eternity. And when he's burned out by the flaming Word, when he's consumed at last by the fiery grace blazing through him, and when he's privileged to translate the truth of God to man, finally transferred from earth to heaven, then bear him away gently and blow a muted trumpet and lay him down softly. Place a two-edged sword on his coffin and raise the tomb triumphant for he was a brave soldier of the Word and ere he died, he had become a spokesman for his God."

That is a high calling. Who can attain it? Paul is speaking to us of such noble things in this epistle. He has already in the first two chapters told us what a pastor does. He has indicated what a pastor is. He has discussed what a pastor says. But now as we come to chapter 3 he is telling us what a pastor feels. And this is really under it all, for what he does and what he says and what he is is the product of what he feels. And so we have now descended, as it were, to the pastor's heart. We are reaching deeply into the heart of a man who must give an account to God for how he shepherds the sheep.

You remember that after Paul had established the Thessalonian church in a matter of brief weeks. He had then had to leave, along with his companions Timothy and Silas. He left that young baby

church on its own. It was apparent that some would come along and then begin to attack Paul and say to these new Thessalonian believers that Paul was a charlatan, a fake and a fraud, a false teacher in it for the money, wanting simply to take their souls for his own personal power and gain. And his integrity would be greatly assaulted. And so what he writes in these first three chapters back to the Thessalonians is for the record, a rehearsal of his own character, reminding them that he was no fake and he was no phony and he was no charlatan and he was no fraud and telling them to remember what he did, to remember what he said, to remember what he was and now to know what he feels. And thus pulling all of those components together to understand that he was in every sense a true pastor. He had integrity.

So as we come to chapter 3 he is still talking about himself. Oh, he has referred to them, of course, and he has praised God for what they are. He has discussed the group things that were true of them. But the real heartbeat of this passage in these early chapters is to strengthen their confidence in his integrity so that they, along with everyone else who ever reads this epistle, will know the kind of man he was and the kind of man any pastor is to be.

We're looking at the first ten verses. And in these first ten verses we see the pastor's heart. Let me remind you of what we learned last week. The first thing that characterizes the pastor's heart is affection for his people. Already in chapter 2 he has said to them, verse 17, "I am bereft of you, I am eager with great desire to see your face." Verse 18, "We wanted to come to you." Verse 19, "You are our hope and joy and crown of exaltation." Verse 20, "You are our glory and joy, therefore when we could endure it no longer..." All of this indicates to us his affection for them. He felt the pain of the short separation. He was eager with a great desire to be with them. He more than one time wanted to come, but Satan had thwarted him. They were his joy. They were his glory both now and in eternity. Therefore he could endure the separation no longer.

All of that reminds us of his affection for them. Intense feeling brought him pain in the separation. He wanted to be with them. He couldn't bear the ignorance about their spiritual condition. He had gone in, preached the gospel with Timothy and Silas. They had believed, at least they confessed that. He had tried to nurture them in the foundational things for a few weeks, then he was gone. They had no mature leadership, just baby Christians in the midst of a pagan and hostile environment. He had no word about them and was deeply concerned. In fact, his affection for them was so strong that his ignorance was unbearable. He had to know their spiritual condition under persecution. And so he says, "When we could endure it no longer," he repeats that same phrase, by the way, in verse 5. "For this reason when I could endure it no longer..." Affection was a strong compulsion to nurture, to protect his believing children who were facing difficulty, trial, distress, affliction, persecution. And he had such love for them that he could not bear not knowing.

A true pastor is one who has affection for his people. Like Jesus who loved His sheep...He says in John 10, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life and I lay My life down for

the sheep." John 14 was the principle, John 10 was the personal testimony..."I laid down my life for the sheep."

The second thing we noted about the pastor's heart is that it is filled with unselfishness toward his people. Affection for his people means unselfishness toward his people. For whomever you love, you sacrifice. His strong affection led him to selflessness. Look back at 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, our brother, and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ. Timothy was Paul's brother. His truest friend, his dearest friend, his spiritual clone, his spiritual son, the one most like Paul, the one most like-minded with Paul, his best, his treasured friend. Not only that, he was God's fellow worker, gifted, capable. And the work at Athens where he was when he sent Timothy was difficult. He was facing cynical philosophers and speculators. He was in a very anti-God, anti-Christ situation. It would have been easy for him to say, "I wish I could send Timothy but I need him so much here, we're trying to reach a whole city of philosophers, we're trying to reach a city on its way to hell. I need his help. I don't want to be alone in trying to confront this cynical culture." But he said, "I couldn't endure the separation, I couldn't endure not knowing about you. I couldn't stand the lonely ignorance and so I thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone and sent Timothy." This is unselfishness.

For the good of his people, and for the knowledge of their well-being and for their spiritual welfare, he would gladly be all alone in a hard, hard place. He unselfishly gave his best, that's the heart of the pastor. Not only in the people he gives but in the time he gives, in the energy he gives, in the funds he gives, in the effort he gives, in every way the heart of a true pastor is unselfish toward his people. Again I submit to you that that is Jesus Christ, what a model shepherd. What more can a shepherd give not only than his best but his life? But His life. "I lay down My life for you." Because He loved us so much He was utterly unselfish and gave us His best. And so is the model. Christ first, and then Paul the under-shepherd who also gave his best for the sake of his people.

The third attitude in a pastor's heart is compassion. And we noted last time that he had compassion for his people. The reason he sent Timothy in verse 2, "Was to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith." He was concerned with them being strengthened and encouraged. Why? "So that no man...verse 3...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. So it came to pass, as you know."

He is concerned because they are in trouble, persecution, pressure, affliction. And he completely identifies with the pain of persecution. He completely identifies with the trouble and he feels compassion. He entered in to their pain. He said, "I want to strengthen you. I want to encourage you as to your faith in the midst of your affliction. I've told you we were destined to have it, I told you it would come and its come and I know what you're going through, I identify with it." He wanted to see their faith encouraged and strengthened in the midst of very trying circumstances. They were being

persecuted. They were being attacked. Satan was after them. Demons were after them. Godless men and women were after them. And again I submit to you, Jesus is the perfect model of compassion again, for it is He who is the sympathetic high priest who is touched the feelings of our infirmities, who is the perfect Shepherd, the true Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who feels the pain of His wounded people. Jesus, the true Shepherd, Paul the under-shepherd had a pastor's heart...a heart by affection, unselfishness and compassion.

That brings us to verse 5 where we pick up the text today. The fourth attitude, and all of these are attitudes, beloved, all of these are attitudes in the heart. The fourth attitude of the pastor's heart is protectiveness for his people...protectiveness for his people. Verse 5, and again you note the repetition showing his affection, "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 and our labor should be in vain."

For this reason...he says. When I could endure it no longer, so I sent to find out about your faith. What's the reason? The fear that the tempter had tempted you and all our effort was for nothing. I wanted to protect you from the tempter. This is the real care of the pastor. Paul had a great sense of watchfulness, a sense of protectiveness. He was deeply concerned. To be real honest with you, when he sent Timothy...now remember, he was in Athens when he sent Timothy, later on in Corinth Timothy returned back and told him everything was well at Thessalonica, and that's when he wrote this letter back. So the commendation of this church in chapter 1 is based on Timothy going and bringing back the report. But at the time when he sent Timothy, he had no such report. He didn't know if their faith would stand the test. Consequently he didn't know if it was real faith.

There is a kind of response to the gospel that springs up for a little while. Remember the rocky ground in Matthew 13? And when the tribulation comes and the pressure and the persecution, it dies. There is a kind of response that springs up for a little while, but it's the weedy ground and the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the allurements of the flesh choke it out and it dies. And only time will tell. And when Paul sent Timothy, he didn't have any word yet about their labor of love and their patience of hope. He didn't have any word about the fact that they were imitators of Paul and the others. He didn't have any word that the Word was sounding out from them. He didn't have any word yet that they had truly turned from idols to serve the living God and that they were waiting for Jesus Christ. That's what he wanted to know. Was their faith real? You can't tell at the moment. You may not be able to tell in the first few weeks. But when the trials come and the testing comes, then you can tell.

One of the Russians who spoke here at our seminary commencement said...We had an American evangelist recently who came to the Soviet Union, a well-known one, you would all know. He stood in front of a congregation of people massed into a building, stuffed in there as they do in Russia. And he said, "All of you who want to be Christians raise your hand in the air." And the Russians were shocked because no one has done that, that's not a custom in Russia. And he said about 300 people

raised their hand in the air upon which this evangelist said..."Now isn't it wonderful? You're all Christians and let's rejoice that these people are all Christians." The Russians were shocked because to them a Christian is known not by raising his hand in a moment of time, but by passing the test of persecution. A faith tested is validated.

Paul didn't know if they were making the test. Paul certainly may have believed that some of those Christians in Thessalonica that he met and shared those few weeks with were real, but he was not yet sure about that congregation as a whole when he sent Timothy and that's why he sent him. He was protective of his efforts. He was protective of the investment of time and energy. And he knew full well what would happen when he left. Remember Acts 20? When he met with the Ephesian elders he said this to them, "I know after my departure grievous wolves shall enter and not sparing the flock." Immediately, as soon as I go the wolves will come. And then he said, "Of your ownselves, perverse men will rise up and lead people astray." It's inevitable. It is absolutely inevitable. That's why when he wrote to Timothy he said, "If you want to be a noble servant of Jesus Christ...1 Timothy 4:6 at the end of Paul's life when he wrote that letter to Timothy, he said...if you want to be a noble servant of Jesus Christ, then you have got to warn your people that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, propagated by hypocritical liars." You've got to warn your people about false teachers, false doctrine, perverse men rising from the inside, grievous wolves coming from the outside. More than that, here he says, "I was concerned, I was afraid that the tempter might have tempted you."

What does Satan want to do when the seed is sown? Well if he can't come along and pick it right off, he wants to destroy it at the heat of persecution. He wants to choke it out with the enticing lusts of the flesh and the eyes and the pride of life that are lured by the world and riches. Paul was concerned. He was protective. They were all baby Christians, brand new in the faith, susceptible to temptation, to fleshly weakness, to discouragement, to fear, to failure. The heart of the pastor is protective of his people.

This, by the way, is an emphatic expression of his anxiety prompting him to send Timothy. "I want to know your faith is real. I want to be sure it is standing the test. I want Timothy to come and strengthen you and encourage you and reassure you. I want to find out that you weren't rocky soil, weedy soil." And he and a very rational fear, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you. Who is the tempter? Who tempted Jesus, Matthew 4? Satan, he's the tempter. And he wants to tempt.

By the way, he's got basically three approaches that he uses. First one, his first work is to try to keep people from believing. Second Corinthians 4 says, "The god of this world has...what?...blinded their minds lest they believed, lest the light of the glorious gospel shine unto them." His first work, keep them from believing...keep them from understanding, keep them from believing.

Second approach, if they're starting to believe and they're starting to make a move toward saving faith, destroy that initial response. That's where you see the tribulation coming against the rocky ground. That's where you see the weeds choking out the seed. Satan's second work is to destroy the initial movement of faith.

His third work where there is saving faith...if he couldn't stop it all together, and he couldn't choke out its initial movings, the third thing he wants to do is weaken the saving faith. He couldn't stop a person from believing, and obviously in God's power and providence and sovereignty, God is going to move that person to true faith. Satan can't stop that, what he'll try to do is attack that believer and weaken his faith, suck him into sin. And he's got a lot of ways to do it. One illustration comes to mind, 1 Corinthians 7 verse 5, in your marriage relationship between husband and wife, it says, "Stop depriving one another sexually, don't hold back your physical affection." Why? "Lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control." If you're not fulfilled in your marriage, you'll get tempted to be fulfilled outside your marriage and Satan will do that. That is just one way Satan tempts. He goes after the believer to weaken his faith, to lure him into sin.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 11, Paul says, "I'm concerned that no advantage be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." Don't get in a position where he takes advantage of you.

First Peter, Peter says in 5:8, "Satan goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Second Corinthians chapter 11, Paul says, "Satan appears as an angel of light, disguised as an angel of light, looks like a true preacher, a true prophet, truly speaking for God...and he is a liar and he is a deceiver." In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul says, "I'm afraid, I'm afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

If Satan can't stop you from believing, if he can't choke out your first longings toward faith, then he'll try to devastate your faith, weaken your faith, suck you into sin by his schemes, by taking advantage of you in any way he can. That was Paul's fear.

And a good pastor is a protector. Hey, a good shepherd had as a primary responsibility to protect the sheep, right? Protect them from eating the wrong things, protecting them from drinking stagnant water, protect them from rocks, protect them from wolves, protect them from thieves. The heart of a pastor is protective. He wants to get his arms around his people.

Here is Paul sitting in Athens, separated from his little baby church at Thessalonica and saying to himself..."I don't know what condition they're in." It's like leaving your children somewhere, you know where they are but you can't help them, you can't get to them and they're in the midst of a very, very difficult situation, they're under attack and they're your little babies and you can't protect them. His mothering instincts, his fathering instincts spiritually created immense frustration.

And then he says, "Our fear would be that the tempter would come and tempt you and our labor should be in vain." What a statement. That Satan would come and snatch the seed away. Satan would come and bring the pressure and the plant would die, choke off and it would all be for nothing. Our labor, our word kopos, sweat, toil, would be for nothing...useless, empty void, wasted, pointless.

Tremendous effort took him to Thessalonica and a tremendous effort went on there. It would be a horrible thing to imagine that it might have been for nothing. Paul felt that way often. He wrote back to the Galatians, "What had happened? He preached the truth, then some Judaizers came in and said...No, you can't be saved by grace, you have to be saved by grace and works." Paul writes back and says, "I'll tell you, if anybody comes and preachers that stuff to you, I don't care if he's an angel from heaven, let him be accursed." And then he says in chapter 2 verse 2, he says, "It was because of a revelation that I went up and submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, I did so in private to those who were of reputation for fear that I might be running, or had ran in vain."

The first thing he says is "I don't want my life in vain, I don't want my life in vain." Then over in chapter 4 verse 11, "I fear for you that perhaps I have labored over you in vain." I don't want to live my life in vain, and I don't want to do my work for nothing. I want to know it's fruitful. And that was why he was so concerned in the Galatian letter to undo this legalistic Judaizing works/righteousness system because it would have negated his work.

Listen to Philippians chapter 2 verse 16. Paul says, "You're lights in the world, holding fast the Word of life, hold on tight, hold it fast so that in the day of Christ when I go to my reward I may have cause to rejoice because I didn't run in vain, or toil in vain." Paul wanted to know their faith was real, it wasn't shallow, superficial, non-saving faith. And it's strong and it was standing firm so that his labor would not be for nothing, in vain.

And so he was a protector. He didn't want to work for nothing. He didn't want to come to the end of his life and realize that all the effort he had made was absolutely empty and void. And if their faith did fail, then it would have been for nothing. If their faith failed then they weren't real Christians at all. Or if their faith failed, they had those initial longings toward believing but they were choked out, and even if their faith was real and they were true Christians and they fell into gross sin at some point, temptation, victims of those attacking them, it would have broken his heart and he would have felt like he failed. So there's a protectiveness.

I understand that. I understand that. I am very concerned about what you read, about what you listen to. We watch very carefully what we have in the bookstore. I speak to you very, very clearly about certain doctrines and certain issues and sometimes certain people that you need to avoid. I'm very concerned to preach holiness. We're very concerned about church discipline. Why? To protect you from the tempter who would lead you astray, cause our labor to be in vain. Jesus, the great

Shepherd, true Shepherd, Good Shepherd, felt the same way. As He prayed to His Father, the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel, verse 15, He says, "I don't ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." He prayed a protective prayer, too. He told Peter, "I'm going to protect you. Satan's going to sift you, he's going to throw you in the air, turmoil, trouble, but I'm going to protect you."

What marks the true shepherd's heart? Affection, unselfishness, compassion, protectiveness. Let me give you a fifth, delight in his people. The true pastor finds his delight in his people. This is another feature of the shepherd's heart. Get the picture. Verse 6 marks Timothy's return. By now Paul is no longer in Athens, he's gone on to Corinth. Silas comes back from Macedonia where he's been visiting Philippi and Timothy comes back from Thessalonica. And, boy, is Paul thrilled for Timothy to come back. And verse 6 says, "But just now," Greek word artemeans "just now that Timothy has come to us from you." So what we can conclude is that this letter was written immediately upon Timothy's arrival. When Paul sent Timothy he didn't know the condition. But now that he writes this letter back, he has just gotten the word. Timothy came back and now we get an up-to-the-minute response. Look at verse 6, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you," and what did he say? "And has brought us good news." Stop right there.

That must have been a wonderful day. More and more weeks have passed. Paul was now in Corinth, his heart longing to know what was going on. Timothy arrived and at the same time Silas arrived and the news from Timothy was, I love this, "Good news." Rather than using a simple word, he doesn't just say, "And Timothy gave a good report," or "Timothy came back and told us so-and-so." He said, "Timothy brought good news." You know what word he uses? The word "gospel," euangelizo, it's only used in the New Testament everywhere else to refer to the gospel. He brought us such good news I have to use a word that is usually referring to the news of salvation to even express how good it is. He takes the term reserved usually for the message of salvation by grace through faith, and so it was that kind of good news, thrilling news. And it really is amazing. He had such a heart for those people that he gets this report from Timothy and he calls it "gospel," good news, the best news.

And what was it? Well it was sort of a four-point report. Point one, your faith, good news about your faith. Your faith was real. You were good ground, weren't rocky soil, weren't weedy ground, didn't get choked out, didn't get burned off, you were good ground...good news about your faith, you're real. And he says, second point, good news about your love. You love God, you love Christ, you love each other, you love the lost.

Could I say this to you? And I believe it's so very true. Those two things, faith and love, say it all. John Calvin said, "Those two words are the sum of godliness." It's the sum of godliness. If I have faith in God and love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and my neighbor as myself, I fulfill...what?...the whole law. It's the sum of godliness. To believe to love says it all. So

Paul says, "I got the word, your faith is real, your love is real. That's the sum of the believer's duty to God and man and it was the simplest way to say the Thessalonians were real Christians.

Not only that, they're obedient Christians. Galatians 5 says it. In verse 6 Paul writes to the Galatians and this is what he says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything," and again he's correcting that works system. He says that doesn't mean anything. "But here's what means something, faith working through love." Those are the two things. Faith working through love. This is delight. The pastor delights in his people.

There's a third part of the report. Point three of Timothy's little report. Good news about your faith, good news about your love and good news that you always think kindly of us. Good news about your loyalty, your personal love for me. What a delight. He was thrilled that they cherished happy memories of him. He had been in Athens and in Corinth and probably saying to himself, "Well, they're going to hate me cause those detractors and those people who think they have to vilify me, those people who oppose me, they're going to tell them all kind of lies about me and they're going to spread all kinds of rumors about me and they're going to look back and they're going to think...Well, yeah, maybe he was like that...and they're going to resent me and hate me and that means I'm not going to have a ministry to them anymore. And then they would reject what I taught them.

He was worried, fearing that the tempter would have tempted them in that way and it was good news, it was gospel, it was the best news that they always think kindly of us. The Corinthian church had turned on them when he wrote 2 Corinthians. Chapter 12 verses 19 to 21 he says, "I don't even want to come to you cause I know when I come to you you're not going to be what I want and I'm not going to be what you want and we're going to have conflict." On one occasion he said, "All in Asia have turned away from me." He had all kinds of people on his case. And what a delight was Timothy's message. No, Paul, they always, always think kindly of you.

And he had a fourth point in "little good news" outline, point number four, longing to see us just as we long to see you. Good news about their faith, good news about their love, good news about their loyalty, good news about their longing to see Paul. What a vindication. After all, he said, "I nursed you like a nursing mother," chapter 2 verse 8, "I encouraged and exhorted you like a father. You are my joy, you are my glory, you are my crown of exaltation. You're the most precious thing in my world, therefore you can cause me the greatest pain or bring me the latest delight." And oh what good news. Your faith is in tact, your love is in tact, your loyalty is in tact and you long for fellowship with me.

You say, "Was that important to him?" Look at verse 7. "For this reason, brethren, for this reason, this good news, brethren, in all our distress and affliction, we were comforted about you through your faith." Because of the report of Timothy, for that very reason, in all our choking pressure, all the crushing trouble that had come on him...read the eighteenth chapter of Acts and find out about it, bad

news from Galatia, having to care for all the churches, having to do the work of making tents to support his living...in all the troubles and trials and pains of his heart, it all of a sudden disappeared and we were comforted about you when we heard about the reality of your faith. We were strengthened for the work, the genuineness of their faith, the fact that he had received evidence that it was real saving faith was the most basic cause of his delight. And then he delighted in their love and their loyalty and their longing to be with him.

By the way, it's the fourth time in the chapter that he's mentioned their faith. Faith is always the key. What delights the heart of a pastor? The faith of his people, the love of his people, the loyalty of his people, the longing of his people to fellowship with him. That's the pastor's delight.

The pastor's delight is not the size of the building, the looks of the facility, his reputation, his success, his degrees, the level of the fame of his congregation, the salary he gets, his prestige in the community. That's not the delight of a true pastor. The pastor's delight is found in his people. They can break his heart and they can make his heart rejoice.

And look how he sums it up in verse 8. "This is the pastor's heart, for now we really live if you stand firm in the Lord." That's it. Where is your delight? We really live, he says. You know what? It's as if he says we live once more here because he had been experiencing the death of lonely ignorance. He was in a dead time not knowing, there was a deadness, there was a pall of death over him and when the news came and it was all good, he says, "Now we really live if you stand firm in the Lord." That's our delight. That's our joy. That stimulates me to new ministry just to know that. That is the pastor's heart. That is his joy if his heart is right, to know that his people believe and stand fast in the Lord.

If you have a strong faith, if you have a strong commitment--that word "standfast" is a military term, steko. It refers to a refusal to retreat against an attack. Stand your ground under attack. When I see you stand your ground under attack, I really live, I really live. I know you've got your armor on, you're holding up the shield of faith. I really live. To the Corinthians he wrote, chapter 16 verse 13, "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." To the Galatians he wrote, chapter 5 verse 1, "Keep standing firm." To the Philippians he wrote, chapter 1 verse 27, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ that I may hear of you that you're standing firm." In chapter 4 verse 1, the Philippians again, he said, "Therefore my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." And in that second letter to the Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 15, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." Always wanted them to stand firm...stand firm. And always the idea was standing against an attack and showing your faith is real, your commitment is strong. That's the delight of the pastor's heart.

Not buildings, not size, not success, not reputation, not money, strong faith. I find my greatest delight in the strength of the people. I find my greatest heartache in the weakness of the people. Again Jesus is the model, whenever He finds true faith heaven rejoices, read Luke 15. When the lost coin is found, the angels celebrate with God. When the lost sheep is found, the angels celebrate with God. When the lost son is found, all of heaven breaks loose in a mammoth celebration. And when the true and faithful servant serves the Lord and goes to his reward, he is told, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." Heaven rejoices. The true Shepherd, Jesus, rejoices because His delight is in the faithfulness of His people.

The pastor's heart...what are those attitudes? Affection, selflessness, compassion, protectiveness, delight. Number six, just briefly, gratitude for his people. Verse 9, "For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account?" He continues to express his joy and delight for the spiritual progress for his people but this time he focuses it on God because he knows God is the one who made it happen. He doesn't say, "I thank you for it," he says, "I thank God for it." I praise God for it.

You know what I believe a true pastor is? He is a thankful man. He isn't stuck on the negatives in his church. He isn't focusing only on the manure pile in the meadow. He sees the flowers, he sees the beauty. The true pastor has a thankful heart. Paul says, "I'm so thankful, my joy is so large I don't have the words to get around it. I wish I had words." And he said, "What thanks can we render to God for you?" What words can we say to repay...it literally means, a very strong verb...to repay for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account? You by God's grace have made us so happy, I can't find words to thank God.

Let me tell you something. If there's a dour, sour, down-in-the-mouth pastor, this is not a pastor's heart. A pastor who is faithful will be thankful in rejoicing over what God is doing in the heart of his people. That is why in Hebrews 13 it says, "You need...you need to follow the lead of your pastors, obey them so that when they do their work they can do it with joy and not with grief because that's unprofitable for you." A grieving, sour, unhappy, bitter, miserable pastor who is unappreciated, unloved, his people do not respond is heartbroken and his grief becomes your grief. But when you're faithful and loyal and loving to follow the Word of God, the pastor will have a thankful heart and his thankful heart will energize the whole church.

The last is in verse 10. This is very, very simple. The pastor's heart attitude is affection, unselfishness, compassion, protectiveness, delight, gratitude, finally intercession for his people...intercession for his people, prayer for his people. Along with rejoicing, hey you realize they're not perfect, you say, "If you stand firm I really live, oh I can't find words to get around my joy, it's too large...I'm so thankful to God for you." But at the same time, "As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face and may complete what is lacking in your faith."

In other words, I also realize that there's still work to be done and so there's intercession. Please notice the frequency of this intercession...night and day, all the time...all the time. The fervency of this intercession, earnestly...earnestly, most earnestly. The focus of this intercession...we keep praying. Boy, frequency--night and day; fervency--most earnestly; focus--we keep praying, we keep praying.

What are you praying for? What is this issue? Number one, "That we may see your face," fellowship...fellowship. I want to see your spiritual condition. I want to know you. I want to know what's going on in your life.

Secondly, "I may complete what is lacking in your faith," spiritual growth. I want to see your spiritual condition and I want to be used by God to make you grow spiritually.

See your face, cause you to be complete in whatever us lacking in your faith. The word complete, katatizo, means to fit together, to set a broken bone, to mend a torn net. I want to put you together complete. That's what we pray for. The pastor's heart is an interceding heart.

Certainly that's basic, isn't it, to giving yourselves to the ministry of prayer and the Word as Acts 6:4 says it? That was Jesus, too, wasn't it? Wasn't He grateful to the Father in John 17? Didn't He have gratitude and thank the Father that He had given Him His children? And then didn't He pray for them? John 17, didn't He pray and intercede for them? Sure He did. Jesus is the model of affection for His sheep, the model of unselfishness, compassion, delight, gratitude and prayer and Paul is the human under-shepherd who models it right here. That's God's standard for us. If you're going to be a faithful shepherd, take the exhortation of Paul..."Be ye followers of me even as I am of Christ." Let's bow to pray.

Father, there was much in the Thessalonians' lives that still needed work. There were some things that needed to be completed that they were lacking. And so we know that beginning in chapter 4 Paul speaks about sexual sin, about living in society with the unsaved, about facing death and the future, about spiritual alertness, about responding to leadership, about attitudes toward other Christians, about basic principles of all kinds of holy living. There was much yet to be done and so this great shepherd, this wonderful man of God whose heart was filled with affection, unselfishness, compassion, delight and gratitude was also committed to intercession because he knew that this side of heaven there would be no perfection and he had to be faithful to pray for the continual progress of his people. Father, make us shepherds like this, make me a shepherd like this. Raise up shepherds like this to lead your flock and bring down shepherds who are not like this that your sheep might not be abused, wounded, grieved and led astray, left unprotected to fall into sin, temptation, error, confusion and lose their usefulness. Make us pastors with a heart like Paul who had a heart like the chief Shepherd, we pray in His name. Amen.

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