

1Thessalonians 12-03-23a

This is Friday, the 23rd of March, 2012. We're in the Book of First Thessalonians. We're right at the threshold of Chapter 3. We'll pray and then begin.

Father, thank you for this opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will superintend. May each one who participates this evening find a meaningful and pertinent truth from your word that your Holy Spirit can use to further your plan and purpose for our lives.

We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified. We ask it in his name, amen. The letter that Paul is writing to the believers that he left behind in Thessalonica has run in sort of a gillal circular fashion if you will, in reviewing who the messengers were and are, what the message is, and the recipients and the nature of the reception that they gave both to the messengers and to the message.

And this is really important. And we saw last time that this gives us clues as to how we can know that we have identified a valid messenger who is in fact communicating God's message, God's word. Paul emphasized last time, he said, you received us and the word that we brought, but you didn't receive it as the word of men, but as the word of God.

And he closes chapter two by saying that, at least this section of chapter two up in verses 15 and 16, by saying that these who persecute, those who try to receive God's word, killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets. They persecuted us and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved. So as always to fill up their sins.

And you see the measure of is in italics, fill up their sins. And I just wanted to touch on that before we continue because this idea of filling up is two-sided. You can accrue judgment over time.

We saw this in Romans chapter two. When we memorize that section, the man who ignores the word of God treasures up to himself wrath in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to every man according to his deeds. And this idea of accruing is something that doesn't get a lot of coverage.

It doesn't get a lot of airtime. It isn't something that you really hear talked about much from God's word. But we like to think about laying up treasure in heaven.

We like to think about gathering gold and silver and precious stones. We don't like so much to think about the fact that if we are not pursuing the plan and purpose of God as believers, that we can be treasuring up the opposite. But this idea of filling up sins, filling up is a process.

And as something is filled, there's more of it and more of it, right? This goes all the way back to

Genesis. You remember God talking to Abraham way back in Genesis chapter 15 and verse 16. He was predicting the future of Abraham's descendants.

You don't have to turn there unless you want to, but I'll read it. In Genesis 15, 12, the sun was going down and deep sleep fell upon Abraham and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then he, God said to Abraham, know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs and will serve them and they will afflict them 400 years.

And also the nation whom they serve, I will judge. Afterward, they shall come out with great possessions. Now, as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace.

You shall be buried at a good old age, but in the fourth generation, they shall return here. They, your descendants shall return here to the land of promise for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full, not yet complete. It is going to take centuries before God decides that the iniquity of the Amorites is full.

It accrues, it accumulates. And this is just a reminder that we should be aware of both the positive and the negative aspects of the accrual method of accounting, that things pile up, things get added to a list. And it is incumbent upon us to claim the grace of God for forgiveness and cleansing and the separation of our sins from us as far as the East is from the West.

If we neglect it, if we fall away, if we are disinterested, we are no longer walking in the light. We are no longer cleansed by the blood of Christ in the experiential sense. We're still saved, but we begin to accrue unto ourselves judgment in the day of judgment.

And I don't have to review for you Romans chapter two, but we don't like to think about it. It's not a popular subject from the pulpit, but it's a fact. And it is alluded to here in 1 Thessalonians chapter two by Paul when he says, these Judeans, some of whom are believers, these are not all godless.

They're not necessarily unbelievers. They may not be church age believers. We're in that sort of weird transition generation where someone could die as an old Testament saint, having actually rejected the gospel of Christ and yet be saved under the old Testament economy, sort of almost literally grandfathered in.

But he says, these who forbid us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, these people are interested in God. They believe in the God of Abraham. They just believe that they are the only ones qualified to have a relationship with him.

And that if you're not Israelite, you're not anything. And they fill up their sins. They accumulate to the point of radical judgment, their sins.

Wrath has come upon them to the uttermost, or depending on how you translate this, it is at the last. If you look at this at the end of verse 16, it can be translated, wrath has come upon them to

the utmost. And yet you look around and they haven't received any wrath.

So what is Paul referring to? Well, it is a reminder that in God's mind, these things are fate accompli. We are already sanctified, even though in some ways we're not sanctified and we are saved, even though in some ways we are not yet fully delivered. And so in this phrase where he says, wrath has come upon them.

And then the final phrase is, eis telos. Telos means the end and eis means with a view toward. Wrath has come upon them with a view toward the end or with reference to the end.

And that means wrath is ordained for those who follow this pattern. That wrath is certain. It's kind of like Martin Luther's mighty fortress lyrics, lo, his doom is sure.

And the judgment on this behavior is certain. It has come. It has already been pronounced, even though they haven't reached the judgment seat yet.

The reason I bring this up, that we're backtracking, just taking a quick step back is because as we move forward, Paul is going to be talking about the judgment and talking about joy and rejoicing and glory at the judgment. But he has alluded rather gently and rather obliquely to the fact that there are going to be two different outcomes at the judgment. As he elaborates again in Romans 2. For some who by faith and patient continuance and well-doing are seeking for glory and honor and immortality, they get that eternal life package.

But on others, there's tribulation, wrath and anguish. Irrespective of whether you started out as a Jew or a Greek. And so as he moves forward here in chapter two, let's read this final section of the chapter, verse 17.

But we brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. We're familiar with the situation. Paul run out of town because concerned about them.

Would love to see them. Can't get back there. We wanted to come to you, even I, Paul, time and again, but Satan hindered us.

Interesting that the Apostle Paul, one of the most powerful men endowed by God with miraculous healing powers, with the ability to deliver inspired revelation of mystery doctrines, father to so many churches, apostle to so many places, and easily the most influential Christian of this entire age could be hindered by Satan. He wanted to go to Thessalonica. Satan successfully hindered him.

Now, how does this work? Is the arm of the Lord shortened that it cannot save? Paul prays that he can see the Thessalonians. Is God's ear heavy that he cannot hear? Has Paul committed a sin and God says, I'm not going to listen to your prayer and let you go. God allows, and this is the

observation and application rolled into one here.

God allows Satan certain victories. He allows it. He allows Satan to successfully thwart certain things.

Why? Well, anybody who studied military history, anybody who even thinks about the military equation, you know that in some cases, you can see this in countless civil war battles, a general will intentionally weaken the center. He will intentionally allow the enemy to succeed and to push forward in the middle of his line and let them push forward and get well in behind his front line, only to then bring in his reinforcements at the flanks, encircle, conquer, and destroy. The enemy thinks he is achieving a victory, overextends himself, outruns his defense, outruns his artillery usually, and then is encircled and destroyed.

And it is a strategy. God allows Satan certain victories in this life. And it is woven into the fabric of God's plan for good.

And we have to remember this. We are distraught sometimes when we see a seeming triumph of evil. Missionaries are caught and murdered.

The first great shock to Western civilization was Jim Elliot and Nate Saint and being killed by the Aucas down there. And it seemed like an awful victory for the enemy. But you look at what God has done in and through that episode, and those men have had a ministry and their widows and the ministries that have grown out of that and the eventual attention that was paid to the Aucas has far outrun anything that Jim Elliot or Nate Saint could have imagined.

Their death created a nexus, created a strategic interest in that situation that has burgeoned and it is still known some 50 odd years later, where if they had simply gone down there and evangelized a few natives and left quietly, it would probably have never been what it became. The books would not have been written. Jim Elliot's diaries might never have been published.

And it would have been a completely different thing. So we can't see the big picture. We don't see the entire battlefield.

And often it looks to us like a key man or woman has been lost to the enemy, has been defeated, has been overcome. Something awful has happened. Satan hindered us.

Well, God allowed it. We would not have this letter if God had not allowed Satan to hinder Paul. We wouldn't have this study.

We'd be studying something else. This inspired record with these specific thoughts from God exists because God said, Paul, I can't let you go back and deliver this verbally. I need you to write these things down and I'm going to preserve it.

And it's going to be a blessing to saints from now until the Lord Jesus comes back. He could

never have foreseen it. He was just frustrated.

He had no idea that this letter was going to be the subject of our study nearly 2000 years later, but God did. And so we, as a part of our trust and confidence in God have to accept even what is very recognizably a victory by Satan, a successful ploy by Satan. God is not outfoxed.

God is not outmaneuvered. God is not defeated. God is not surprised.

He's not taken aback. They've got this, Ken heard somebody on the radio, I think touting this process theology where God is kind of, he's really good, but he's just reacting as things go on. He's very quick and very sharp, but he doesn't really know what's going to happen.

And as things happen, he just has to react. He has to come up with something to deal with it. And history is a process and God is just trying to do crisis management day by day and situation by situation.

Not at all. God knows the end from the beginning. He is the Omega as well as the Alpha.

And if he allows Satan to hinder in any way, shape or form, it is being woven together for good, always to those who love God. So Paul says, "We were taken away from you for a short time in presence, but not in heart. We wanted to come to you, Satan hindered us." Now verse 19, "For what is our hope, our joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For you are our glory and joy." Well, this is very fascinating because he's just talked about these ne'er do well resisters.

He's talked about Satan hindering. He's talked about these Judaizers who have hindered and that their sins are filling up and that their judgment has already been ordained. Now he references the judgment again.

He says, "You are our rejoicing, our joy, our hope at the coming of Christ." Well, now how does this work? Because believe me, I have heard endlessly that the level to which you evangelize and the number of people you bring to Christ is what is in view here. It's people that you have impacted. It's people that you have made a difference for.

This is the measure at the coming of Christ. You can see how someone would arrive at that conclusion from this passage, yes? "You Thessalonians are my crown of rejoicing, my hope, my joy at the coming of Jesus Christ." If it wasn't for you and people like you, evidently, perhaps, there would be very little joy in rejoicing. Glad to see the Lord Jesus, glad to be saved, but this is the measure of reward is people.

People who have been affected, who have been blessed, who are the fruit of your ministry, the fruit of the vine as you're plugged into Jesus Christ is people. Is this a valid conclusion to draw, valid observation to make, valid interpretation of this passage that Paul has written? Well, let's take a look at this. First of all, he says, "What is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not

even you?' At the risk of sort of belaboring the obvious, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is writing to a group of Gentiles, which is manifestly his mission and his target, his commission from the Lord Jesus Christ himself is to be the apostle to the Gentiles, right? That's his mission.

Now, hands up, everyone that has been commissioned apostle to the Gentiles in this room. Please don't raise your hand. If you wanted to raise your hand, talk to me later.

You're not an apostle to the Gentiles. Are you potentially a minister to other people? Of course. Can all of us be used by God to bring the evangel, the good news to people? Of course, but this is Paul's mission.

Christ himself entrusted Paul with this mission. And when Paul next sees Christ face to face, the Lord Jesus says, you know, I made you the apostle to the Gentiles. I gave you Holy Spirit power.

I gave you inspiration and miraculous enablement. How did you do? And Paul says, Lord, you see those people over there? You see those people from Thessalonica? That's the fruit of the gifts and the calling that you gave me. That is Paul's crown, his personal commission and gift and calling from the Lord Jesus Christ is fulfilled in these people.

And you remember that there are other passages where Paul talks about a similar thing. And even other apostles say the same thing. You have John the apostle talking in 1 John.

We saw this in 1 John 2, verse 28. Now, little children, this is John. Talking to a church.

1 John 2, 28. Now, little children, abide in him. Abide in Christ so that when he appears, this is the coming, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

Abide in him so that when he appears, we can be confident and not be ashamed at his coming. So at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is going to be the potential for joy and rejoicing or for embarrassment and shame. John says you need to abide in him so that you can be sure that you won't be ashamed at his coming.

And John includes himself. I'm your apostle. I'm the guy writing you these letters.

I don't want to be ashamed at his coming over you either. You abide in him so that none of us are ashamed at his coming, but we all have confidence. That's how John puts it.

So Paul mentions this, 1 Corinthians chapter four and verse five. Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart. If you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then each one's praise will come from God.

So it's not just visible fruit. It's not just how many people have been affected or blessed or ministered to. Paul says, now if Paul was ministering and there were a bunch of Thessalonians

and Corinthians and Philippians standing there at the return of Christ, but Paul had done it out of selfish motives, done it for gain, done it for profit, done it for notoriety, done it to please himself, this clause would condemn him, wouldn't it? The hidden things will be brought to light.

The counsels of the heart will be revealed. And when the counsels of the heart are revealed, each one's praise will come from God. 1 Corinthians 4.5. In Ephesians, Paul says, doing the will of God, listen now, doing the will of God from the heart.

This is Ephesians 6.6. Doing the will of God from the heart with goodwill performing service. This means with the right motivation, performing service as to the Lord and not to men, as to the Lord and not to men. Knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is slave or free.

It's Ephesians 6.6-8. So this is a subject that Paul returns to time and time again. We could visit a lot of other passages, but we're in Thessalonians and we wanna move forward in that, but this is a little bit of side light on this topic. When Paul says our joy and rejoicing, our crown when the Lord returns is you, this is the fruit of Paul's gift.

So by way of application, what would we say about ourselves? How would this apply to us? Well, what is the area that God has gifted you? What is the area where God has gifted me? What provision has he made? What opportunities has he given? What power from the Holy Spirit and insight and motivation have we got? And what did we do with it? We are not all apostles and our fruit is not all gonna be measured by the number of people standing before the Lord Jesus. Some people have a gift in the area of supply and of support and of meeting the needs, washing the feet of the saints, feeding the widows and orphans. And if it is done as under the Lord, Jesus said, you remember, you give a cup of water to one of these little ones in my name, it is as though you have done it unto me.

That's gonna be the measure. To what extent did we exploit and fulfill and multiply the stewardship that God gives each one of us? We each have a spiritual gift. For some of us, it is teaching.

So how diligently and faithfully and carefully did we undertake that responsibility? For some, it is simply being a light shining in a dark place. You are a believer who does not do what everybody around you does. You simply live the life to which you have been called.

You say, well, I don't know what my gift is. Your gift may just be to stand as a rebuke and a condemnation to everyone around you because you refuse to be drawn into the way of sinners and the seat of the scornful. You delight in the law of the Lord.

You meditate in it day and night. You quietly bear your fruit, roots sunk into the ground by the rivers of water. And that's all you do.

And you say, well, I don't know that I've blessed anybody, affected anybody, led anybody anywhere, mentored. All I've done is just try to live my life as under the Lord. That may be your entire calling because nobody around you is doing it, or very few are.

And these righteous ones, Jesus said, in every generation are gonna stand up and condemn everyone that didn't do that. People are gonna say, well, that just wasn't possible in my culture. The pressures were too great and the brainwashing was too strong.

And the Lord Jesus is gonna say, you see my faithful person right over here? Fill in your name. They did it. I gave them the exact same provision I gave you.

And they were quietly faithful. They bore their fruit. They were patient.

They were enduring. They were long-suffering. They didn't give up.

They didn't bow down. They didn't give in. They didn't collapse.

They maintained their standards. They put up with the peer pressure. They put up with the mockery and abuse.

They put up with whatever they had to put up with. So your argument holds no water. Here's somebody that had it a lot worse than you and they were faithful.

And this is the function of some of us is to simply stand for truth, be faithful unto death. Jesus said, be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. And for some, that's all we have to do.

It isn't anything that can be put on a sign or inscribed in a book somewhere. We just live as unto the Lord. We want to please him.

And I think for many of those people who it doesn't have a name, it doesn't have a gift listing in a scripture somewhere. And they say, well, you know, I don't really know that I did anything. The Lord Jesus is gonna say, that was just preparation.

That was tempering. That was readiness. Now, look at what I have for you.

You have been faithful in a few things. I'm gonna make you ruler over many things. And those people who felt like they didn't make a difference, weren't noticed, had no profound impact of any kind, are going to have a tremendous role to play in the future economy.

It's all a matter of faith. This is Paul's calling. This is Paul's reward.

Paul's joy, Paul's glory, Paul's crown of rejoicing is going to be those who represent the fulfillment of his calling, his mission from Christ. You have a calling and a mission from Christ. And day by day, we seek to live in that light.

We wanna be pleasing in his sight. We wanna reflect his glory. We wanna be obedient to the word that has been delivered to us and operate in faith.

We don't understand everything. Things don't always make sense, but we walk by faith and not by sight. And we include in our prayers the request that God will open the door for us, that he will enable us to find that we can bear fruit and that our fruit will remain, that our lives will reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus.

And it doesn't have to have a name. You don't have to, you can't see the book where that righteousness is recorded. It's in heaven.

But at the coming of the Lord Jesus, those books will be opened and every man will be judged according to his works. Paul mentions this in 2 Corinthians 5. He says, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well-pleasing to him. That's the aim.

It isn't to rack up a body count, hang another scalp on the belt, paint another silhouette on the fuselage. What is it? To be well-pleasing to him, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. That's the Bema.

That each one may receive the things done in the body, in this life, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Each one will receive according to what he has done, good or bad. And the word bad there is kakos.

K-A-K-O-S. That's the word that's translated wicked, trouble, evil, injury, worthlessness. Paul made the same point in a different way in Romans chapter 14 and verse 10.

Why do you judge your brother? Why do you show contempt for your brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat, Bema, of Christ. We've got our hands full trying to make sure we are bearing fruit. We are abiding in the vine.

Galatians. We've memorized this. Galatians 6, 7, and 8. Be not deceived.

God is not mocked, right? Whatsoever, whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. He that sows to his flesh, this is believers now. Believers who sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap what? What? Corruption.

Reap corruption. When and where is that reaping? At the judgment seat of Christ. You will receive what is bad if you sow what is bad in the body, in this life.

He that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap what? Life everlasting. The everlasting life package. Not in the flesh.

Not salvation in the sense that, well, you sowed to the Spirit so you're not going to hell. This is the overcomer blessings. The hidden manna.

The things that eye has not seen and ear has not heard and hasn't entered into the heart of man. The things that God has prepared for those who love Him. Colossians 3.23-25. My father inscribed this in front of my Bible when I graduated high school.

Whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. Notice, reward of the inheritance. Inheritance is the reward.

Not just moving into the eternal future. You serve the Lord Christ, but he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done and there is no partiality. Colossians 3.23-25. This is what Paul is talking about.

There is a negative side. There is a positive side. Don't forget.

And it's not just, well, if I can corral a few people and say, hey, he made an impact on my life. That's not the measure for us. It's what has God assigned us.

Where did He place us? What is our opportunity? What is our provision? What is our contact with others? What is our call to faithfulness? Paul was called an apostle and he was faithful. We've been called to whatever we've been called to and it's different for each one of us. And it is required in that stewardship that we be found faithful.

Faithful. Live as unto the Lord. If you're not sure what it is, that's a great subject for prayer.

Lord, help me see what it is you have called me to so that I may execute it faithfully and diligently, heartily, as unto you so that I can stand and rejoice along with Paul and all the rest of the faithful saints when the Lord Jesus returns. It's a great thing to pray. If there's any fuzziness about it, you know, somebody like me, I know exactly what I've been called to.

There's no doubt. There's no mystery about it. But especially when you're younger, you don't always know.

Sometimes you get caught up in things. You say, well, I thought I knew, but I haven't done it lately. I had a great thing to pray about.

Do you think God doesn't want us to know? He wants to keep us in the dark and have us bump into things and not know what our calling and our mission and our goal is, what our purpose is? Of course He wants us to know. So ask. Ask and it shall be given.

Seek and you'll find. Knock and it will be opened. But the Lord may be waiting for that very thing.

He's not going to just drop it on us out of the sky unawares. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up in chapter three.