

Sermon Draft

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1–13

Sermon: “Be Imitators”

Long before Paul knew to call Jesus Lord, the Word of the Lord was speeding ahead, going faster and farther than anyone could ask or imagine. The Word of the Lord was proven true in the conception and birth of the Messiah by a virgin. It went far ahead of expectation when Jesus suffered, died, was buried, and rose again according to Scripture.

The Word of the Lord prevailed mightily when, in a single day, thousands were converted at the preaching of Peter. The Word of the Lord accomplished all these things and so much more long before Paul knew to call Jesus Lord.

When Jesus at long last encountered Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus, what seemed like an interruption, abrupt, troubling and blinding to Paul was all within Jesus’ divine purpose. As the Lord explained to Ananias, who would baptize the newly blinded and newly believing Paul, ***“I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name”*** (Acts 9:16).

Jesus did not say that Paul's life would be easy or pleasant or nice or simple to understand, with a cushy return on his retirement investments. Jesus did not say that Paul would know where he would lay down his head every night or where he would be buried.

Jesus said that he knew and had determined what Paul would be put through for the sake of the Gospel and that Jesus would show his servant those things those pains, those trials, those tribulations.

When you encounter pains or trials or tribulations, what do you do? Are you surprised? Don't be. Suffering and trial are our lot as this old world is wearing out and Satan thrashes around and lashes out, seeking his prey like a hungry lion. Are you wearied? Don't be. Nothing has overtaken you that is not common to man.

Our battles are not new, and they are not our own. We labor with Christ and with all his people. We have confidence because of the Lord's faithfulness and quietness, our lives are his gift entirely.

Paul tells the congregation he planted in Thessalonica to pray that the Word of the Lord would speed ahead just as it did to them, making haste, making a way for faith (v 1). Paul commands that they pray because he knows that the Lord is faithful (v 3a).

The Lord's desire and design for his children is to guard and keep them from the evil one, just as you pray in the Lord's Prayer that you may be delivered from evil, or, more literally, from the evil one. When Paul was wearied or perplexed or downtrodden or near death, he still had a loving Father and a Savior whose atoning blood was shed for him. So do we.

We can have confidence in the Lord's faithfulness because his record is solid (v 4). Which of his promises has failed? The promise that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head? The promise that in the Seed of Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed? The promise that death would not find anyone inside the homes on which the lambs' blood was smeared on the doorposts? The promise that the Virgin would conceive and bear a Son? The promise that the Holy One of God would not see corruption? Which of his divine and everlasting promises has failed? Not a single one!

His record is solid, and his faithfulness is sure. Not a single day in our lives has been lived apart from his care and love. He has never left us, nor has he forsaken us. May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love so richly and eternally displayed in the cross of Jesus, where we see for ourselves how strongly his fatherly love for us is, he came and sought us.

If God were anything other than a loving Father, he would not have sent his Son to the cross for us, laying on the God-man's shoulders our sin, our complaining, our grumbling, our fear, our cowardice, our indifference, our shallowness, and pettiness.

God did not count those trespasses against us but made peace by the blood of Jesus' cross so that we and Paul and all the saints might say together, ***“Therefore, we have peace with God!”*** (Romans 5:1).

The world swirls and changes. It did in Paul's day. It does in ours. We don't have to be confident that “it will all work out.” We don't have to be confident that everything we ever wanted will someday fall into your lap. No such life is promised in the Bible, so don't need to worry about the fact that it didn't happen.

What is promised and seen in the Bible is that Jesus Christ is steadfast. Everything changes; everything comes and goes; the surest things and the surest friends are here today and gone tomorrow. Life fades like a dream, and all flesh is like grass, growing, fading, dying. But the Word of the Lord endures forever. The world will turn and change, but Christ is the same today, yesterday, and forever.

In our text Paul tells the Thessalonians to imitate him and then he adds: ***“For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly...”***

The situation in Thessalonica was that some people, believing the resurrection had already occurred, were living as if nothing mattered, and among other things, had stopped working. They did nothing all day, just gossiped, and chattered and upset their fellow believers, yapping, and running at the mouth (v 11). Sticks and stones can break your bones, and sometimes words do hurt.

Saying anything that comes into our head, having “no filter,” offering our opinion on every subject, and especially proclaiming false doctrine in this case, that the resurrection had already happened, strange as that falsehood may seem are evils far more grievous far more often than a neighborhood kid’s baseball breaking a window.

Jesus said about people’s lives, ***“You will recognize them by their fruits”*** (Matthew 7:16). Don’t just listen to what people say, important as words are but observe also what they do. The gossipers and chatterers do nothing. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that when he first preached the Gospel to them, he was doing anything necessary for the Gospel to spread. He was working with his own hands so he would not burden the Thessalonians (vs 7–8), providing for himself until they were established enough to pay their own pastor and Paul would move on to another place. Examples are powerful, and lives speak volumes. Paul showed by the life he led that the Gospel and the faith of the Thessalonians in the Savior were more important than anything else. He was willing to set everything else aside and to inconvenience himself so that they could hear and believe the Gospel that Jesus was their steadfast Savior.

The busybodies and gossips were willing to set everything else aside (especially productive work!) so that others can pay attention to them and heed their words and stir up trouble and strife. They talk and talk and talk and do nothing because they love to be heard and to take bread from someone else's mouth without lifting a finger.

That's why Paul sums up his teaching with this: ***“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat”*** (v 10). Sound too harsh? The idea is that freeloading comes along with consequences. Talking and not working is not a “victimless crime.” Who will provide meals when a baby is born or someone goes into the hospital? Who will provide a helping hand when the lady down the street is too old to care for her house like she used to? All these things, all this love and care, everything good about being together in our families, our neighborhoods, and our churches, cost someone something whether it be time or money.

Jesus knew that. His forgiveness and mercy cost him his life. He knew that was the cost, and he paid it, nonetheless.

Paul knew that Jesus had paid his whole debt of sin, and he imitated Christ in giving up his rights and entitlements for the sake of the Gospel, working with his own hands so that the new Christians would not have to go without the Gospel.

So, providing lunch after church or meals on the third Monday of the month or when someone's in need or a helping hand around the house or love for a lifetime all have costs, and because we are in Christ, we are happy to bear those costs. We who are in Christ are always bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ, who bore all our sin.

That's why Paul is so definite. He does not want the Thessalonians or us to fall into an empty, vain life, with much pretense of Christ and little of the life that is in Christ. We live the life of Christ, bearing burdens in quiet confidence. Christ, in his quietness, looked only to God for vindication and life, and his confidence was not put to shame. In quietness, he was raised on the third day.

So, let us lead the quiet life we've been given, however noisy the world is around us. Let us share in the burdens of the saints, love our family, our church and let us love our neighbor. We do not need the world's vindication or applause. We have a Father who sees in secret and a Savior in whose scarred hands our whole life is now hidden from sight. When he appears at long last with his angels and all the elect of God, we will receive the life and glories he has laid up for us, the treasures that nothing can touch. He is steadfast, he is faithful, and he will surely do it.

Amen!