

Three Essential Ministry Perspectives

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20
Preached on: Sunday, January 31, 2016

We're in 1 Thessalonians 2 this morning. We're going to be looking at verses 17 through 20 where we will learn of three essential ministry perspectives and I hope this will be instructive to you, it certainly has been and continues to be to me. Follow along as I read the text this morning. 1 Thessalonians 2, beginning in verse 17,

17 But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while - in person, not in spirit - were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, more than once - and yet Satan thwarted us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

It's amazing to think that even as we have been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit, we've been transformed, we've been given a new nature, the same thing occurred to these ancient people in Thessalonica. You may recall this was a city of about a quarter of a million people, a seaport city. It was made up of mostly Hellenistic Greek Gentiles but it also contained a significant number of Jewish people. And you may recall that the Hellenistic culture was notorious for its drunken debauchery; for its sexual orgies. It was a culture that centered around idol worship and mystery cults that offered initiates mystical associations. In fact, every worker had to be part of a trade guild that had their own patron god or goddess, and in some cases multiple gods and goddesses. And these gods and goddesses were fickle; they were easily offended, and certainly they were nonpersonal. And then Paul and Silas come and they preach the Gospel to these people and by the power of the Spirit, they hear the reality of who Jesus is, the Gospel being the complete antithesis to Hellenistic thought. By God's grace, they understand that there is one God in three persons; a holy and a personal God that calls sinners into a life transforming, personal relationship with him. They learn that the Creator God of the universe has called them to know and to serve him. And unlike their gods and goddesses that didn't even exist, they learn that the true God is a permanent, unchanging, sovereign, intimate God that longs to be in relationship with those who will put their trust in his beloved Son. They learn that this God invaded history in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. And through his Son's death and resurrection, they learn that God rescues sinners from coming judgment. They learn that this God actually died for them. An amazing thought. And then invites them to receive forgiveness of sins and become a member of his family forever and receive a righteousness that was completely foreign to them.

Now, can you imagine how offensive that would have been to those people in that day? If you have a hard time imagining it, think how offensive it is to our culture here today to

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tell everyone that they are hell bound sinners unless they place their faith in the saving atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. But by God's grace, many came to faith there in the Lord Jesus. The Jews understood him now to be their Messiah, a suffering Savior who would one day return again to establish his kingdom as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, fulfilling his unilateral, unconditional, irreversible promises, covenants to Abraham and to David. And it's amazing to think that both the Jews and Gentiles that came to faith in Christ also came together in unity in one church, in one body, with all of their religious and cultural baggage. But because they were born again and had received a new nature, they were supernaturally united to Christ and to each other. And Paul tells us and in this passage we learn as well in the book of Acts, we learn how some Jews and even a larger number of Gentile proselytes and even some of the upper class Greek women believed the Gospel. They were miraculously saved. And Paul rejoices in the fact that many of these Gentiles turned from their idols to serve the living God.

So the background, once again here, is that Paul and Silas come to Thessalonica, bring them the Gospel, but then they are forced to flee and this was an untimely departure that was very difficult for them to endure. We'll talk more about that in a moment, but Paul eventually ends up in Athens, and from Athens, Paul sends Timothy to strengthen and to encourage the saints there in Thessalonica. He was deeply concerned that the Gentiles not fall back into their idol worship and all of their sexual immorality, and he was also deeply concerned that the Jews wouldn't fall back into their self-righteous law keeping that was absolutely antithetical to the Gospel of grace.

So he sends Timothy and Timothy's presence was very well received, a profound encouragement to these early saints because, you see, every flock needs a shepherd, and that's why God gives to the church pastor teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and so forth. And what Timothy witnessed and what he therefore reported to Paul was thrilling to him. Imagine now being heartsick and then getting this good news, and it's for this reason we read in chapter 1, verse 2, Paul says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." You can see how Paul is just so thrilled; he's so excited. He goes on to say, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia." And, folks, think about it, this is what has happened to us as well. Even within this worship center, there are people from all over the world and then those that listen by internet, people from all over the world. And

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one of the main things that we have in common is we were all sinners saved by grace and here we are, just like those Thessalonians believers some 2,000 years ago.

Now, also remember that Paul's character and his ministry has come under attack and certainly this is one of Satan's greatest ploys to somehow discourage and distract a pastor or any person serving Christ in a church with various kinds of attacks, and this we know came from both inside and outside the church. This is like a virus that can infect, especially immature believers. Some were saying, "Well, you know, this Paul guy and Silas, they were in it for the money. I mean, look, they are gone, right? They don't really care about you. They have abandoned you. If they really cared for you, they'd still be here." But he reminded them of what they knew firsthand and what they experienced; he reminds them how he loved them like a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. He reminded them that he implored each one of them as a father would his own children to walk in a manner worthy of the God who called them into his own kingdom in glory. And, folks, what we see here is Paul was passionately concerned for their spiritual growth. He longed to see them enjoy the blessings that God has available to all who walk faithfully with him. So the great burden and priority of every faithful pastor and every faithful church member who serves Christ really emerges from this passage as we're going to see.

Now, I also want to remind you that he received similar criticism in other churches. For example, at the church of Corinth they accused him of similar things. You will remember that in 2 Corinthians 11, after he gives that very long list of the many ways he was persecuted and suffered physically, he also said and "there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches." You can just feel the burden of his soul. And he was constantly preaching the holy counsel of God; constantly teaching sound doctrine, refuting false doctrine, and as a result of that, he was attacked from inside the church and outside of the church. But his great burden in ministry was not only the salvation of sinners but for the saints to accurately understand the word and the will of God so that they could be useful in service to him and enjoy the fullness of his blessing.

You will also learn of this burden that he had when we read of his words to the Galatians. Remember, they had gotten sucked into some false teaching and he was kind of pulling his hair out wondering, "What on earth is happening to you?" And he says to them, "My children, I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." In other words, "I feel like an expectant mother going through the pains of labor. I'm in agony for you to understand the truth and to live it out." Now, anyone that knows anything about serving in a church, especially when you're involved with people, you know that it can be difficult; intentional biblical shepherding can be difficult, and certainly pastors who are a part of this particular exposition, understand what I'm saying. If you stop and think about it, we are a

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concentrated group of sinners saved by grace, right? And when we all get together, we can bring out both the best and the worst in each other. In fact, I've learned over the years that the church is a magnet for hypocrites, and it is also a breeding ground for showoffs who are looking for a place to gain some applause. It's also a place where self-proclaimed experts love to come and tell us all that they know. I remember a guy a few years ago told me, and yes he was a part of this church. He's not here anymore. Anyway, he said, I remember him saying to me, "You know, I love my church family as long as I don't have to work too closely with them." And we all can understand that. We're not always going to agree on everything, but we know that there's going to be difficulties in ministry. Paul experience that and yet he continued to love them.

We know, for example, that there is going to be conflict that will be in every church. You read about that, for example, in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul says, "I hear that divisions exist among you and impart I believe it. There must also be factions among you." In other words, he's saying, "Oh, there are some schisms there. Yes, I know." There is always going to be cliques, even heresies, that disrupt a congregation. There is always going to be in a church divisive people that separate themselves on the basis of social distinctions or petty preferences or sometimes even doctrinal error and he says, "This is going to happen." Why? "In order that those who are approved may have become evident among you." In other words, to give a contrast to those who are truly faithful and genuine, pure in character and doctrine. And in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, Paul tells them, "We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak not as pleasing men but God examines our hearts."

So this is a bit of the background here. Paul and Silas come. They proclaim the truth and, as a result, they make enemies; enemies, many of which are inspired by Satan himself but their great burden was for the saints to know the truth and to live the truth and therefore enjoy the truth so that they can experience that soul-satisfying joy of the presence and the power of God deep within their soul.

Now, as we come to this text, I believe there are some very helpful insights here that are instructive, not only for pastors, but for all believers who serve Christ. I want to focus on three essential ministry priorities that really shaped Paul's life and ministry and brought great power and joy to him, come what may. Three fundamental principles that really should shape our life and ministry as well. His example tells us to, 1. Love your flock despite varying levels of maturity. 2. Trust in God's providence despite Satanic opposition. 3. Live in light of future reward despite the cost of discipleship.

Now, let's look closely at the text so that we can understand these great truths and apply them to our life. Bear in mind now that Paul is continuing to answer his critics who have

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accused him of intentionally abandoning them. Verse 17, "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while - in person, not in spirit - were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, more than once - and yet Satan hindered us." Here we see Paul's deep affection and his sacrificial love for these dear saints. The phrase "having been taken away" is from a Greek term "aporphanizo." We get our word "orphan" from that, and it gives us the idea of a child being suddenly and maybe violently torn away from his or her parents, or even a parent who is torn away from a child. And so he's expressing here a heart wrenching loss when he had to leave them. And again, the background there in Acts 17, Paul and Silas had spent several months with them but they were forced to flee. There was an angry mob that threatened to destroy one of the new converts, a man named Jason, and along with several other members of that congregation who had pledged themselves as sureties or as guarantors for Paul and his companions, putting up some of their possessions as bonds that promised the authorities that Paul and Silas wouldn't cause any more trouble in the community, well, Paul and Silas knew that that wasn't going to happen and so they left voluntarily to protect the brethren. Acts tells us that they were sent away by night to Berea. But they felt like they had been ripped away and with the imagery that they had used earlier, it's the idea of a mother who had lost her nursing infant to a kidnapper or a father who had lost his precious child to death. I know how difficult it is for me to be away from you for three weeks. Nancy and I talk about it all the time, "Oh, I wonder how they're doing." Oh, you know, we call, and it's like leaving your family because you are family. I can't imagine what it would be like if all of a sudden I was ripped from you and I may never see you again. That's what was going on for him. In fact, it would've been much worse because most of you are mature believers, these were baby Christians. They needed a daddy and a mommy, so to speak.

We get a better sense of just the pathos of what was going on in Paul's heart in chapter 3, verse 1, he says, "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 one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this." And then in verse 5 he goes on to say, "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 would be in vain." You see, they didn't have email and Facebook and telephones, and so he's concerned, "I wonder how they're doing. Have they succumbed to the pressure of their family and their friends? Or are they staying firm and standing firm in their faith?"

Beloved, here we witness, I believe, the first and most important principle of pastoral ministry, one that should be instructive to each one of us: love your flock despite varying

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levels of maturity. Now, I say varying levels of maturity because they had immature believers in that church just like every church has. If you read on, you will see that there were those that were struggling with various kinds of sexual immorality, that's what they had come out of. Some were so zealous with their preoccupation of the return of Christ they neglected the temporal responsibilities as if those things no longer mattered. You'll read how that not everyone in the church loved each other the way they really should. I can't imagine that happening but that was actually going on there. And some had become noisy, what we would call Bible thumpers; they were frenetic in their evangelism. Others were meddling in other people's lives. And some thought that because they now serve the Lord Jesus Christ they didn't have to serve their masters anymore and fulfill their life obligations and they got lazy and adopted kind of that entitlement mindset. In chapter 5, verse 14, Paul says, "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly," unruly referring to those that were undisciplined, lazy, idle, "encourage," he says then, "the fainthearted," referring to those that are timid, people that are easily discouraged, "help the weak," he goes on to say, this is referring to those who were spiritually and morally weak, those that lacked discernment and that are easily tempted. Then he says, "be patient with all men. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men."

So you get a sense there that, you know, like in every church there were difficulties with the people, but Paul, nevertheless, loved them all passionately and he was greatly distressed because he could not be with them. I want you to ask yourself: does this reflect the attitude of my heart for my fellow church members, my brothers and sisters in Christ? Let me give you a little test: ask yourself, what is my reaction to those who begin to wander away from the church spiritually? Does my heart ache for those who digress from the faith? Am I deeply burdened for those who leave the fellowship of a church family for unbiblical reasons? Do I feel as though I've been orphaned, so to speak? You know, if your response is kind of, "Well, ah, ho-hum," it really betrays that you love yourself more than you love them. Worse yet, it betrays that you love yourself and perhaps this world more than you love Christ because, dear Christian, know this: your love for Christ determines your love for those that belong to him. You see, the more you love and serve him, the more you will love and serve those for whom he died. And the more we understand and wholeheartedly embrace the Gospel, the more we see our own sin and God's love for us as undeserving sinners, the more sympathetic we are to others regardless of what's going on in their life.

This is what was going on with Paul and he was passionately concerned for their spiritual welfare. I want to camp on this for a moment because it's just so important. We see this all through Paul's epistle. For example, you may recall that at the end of his epistle to the Romans, he lists a whole bunch of names of people that he loved and he co-labored with,

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once again, showing his great love for people in the church. Likewise, to the church at Corinth, remember he had some very strong words of rebuke to them, and in 2 Corinthians 2:4 he says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you."

Friends, does that reflect your heart? Have you ever seen someone in your church family begin to drift away and you see them wandering out there, does your heart ache for them? Do you even write them in tears, so to speak, because you care for them? Paul was so concerned about the grievous errors that the Galatians were buying into that he wrote them and confronted them because of that great love, and in chapter 4, verse 16, he says, "So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. My children," he says, "with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you - but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you." You see, that just shows his great love for them.

Likewise, the saints in Ephesus, Paul expresses his love for them. Remember, they were broken hearted when he departed from them and in Acts 20:36 we read this, "When he had said these things," referring to Paul, "he knelt down and prayed with them all." Can you imagine that scene? He knelt down and he prayed with them all, "And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again." Then it says, "And they were accompanying him to the ship." What a sad scene and yet what a magnificent testimony of genuine love.

He expressed the same love and burden to the Philippians. He said in Philippians 1:7, "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

Beloved, this should be the attitude of our heart as well. "Yes, but pastor, you must understand some of the folks in my church are so hard to get along with. Some of them are worldly. Some of them are weird. Some of them are rude and arrogant. And a lot of them just don't see things the way I think they need to see them." Oh really? So what should we do? Should we shun them? Should we go somewhere and kind of scratch out a spot and pitch a fit? No, we are to treat them as the Lord treats us. We are to love them and be burdened for their sanctification. Boy, it's hard to do, isn't it? And the only way

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you will do that is in the power of the Spirit, and here's the key to that: the more you love Christ, the more you serve him, the more he will give you a love for the people. It's as simple as that.

So notice what Paul says again, "brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while - in person, not in spirit - were all the more eager with great desire to see your face." He longed to be with them face-to-face. He wanted to have intimate contact with them. Can I digress for a moment? I know they didn't have email back then, they didn't have Facebook and all of that stuff, but Paul's not going to email them. He's not going to give them a phone call. He's not going to text them. He wants to sit down, I know this is a novel thought for some of you, but actually look at them in the eye and have a conversation with them; to have intimate, human contact for spiritual purposes. That's what he wanted and, boy, that's what we need, and how powerful it is to say, "Hey, Lucas, how are you doing? Man, let's get together. Let's don't just talk on the phone, let's get together." And we do that and others as well. And we can sit down over a cup of coffee and we can interact. That's what he wanted here and yet he says, "Satan hindered us."

Now, this is a problem that every ministry will face because we must remember that we serve the Lord in enemy territory, right? I mean, John tells us in 1 John 5:19, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." So we serve the Lord behind enemy lines so naturally we're going to encounter enemy opposition, but we must remember that there is nothing that can thwart the eternal purposes of God. Scripture is filled with that truth. Ephesians 1:11 says that "God works all things after the counsel of His will." And Paul knew that ultimately God was in control, that Satan can only do what God allows. It is for this reason that Paul later comforted the persecuted Thessalonians by sending Timothy. I read it earlier, chapter 3, verse 3, "to strengthen and encourage them in their faith so that no man would be disturbed by these afflictions," and then he says, "for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this." You can see here that God is in control. It's as if he's saying, "Trust him." And he went on to add that he feared, in verse 5, "that the tempter might have tempted you, and your labor should be in vain." Folks, this underscores the second essential perspective that is so crucial in ministry, especially for pastors but for all of us, and that is: trust in God's providence despite satanic opposition.

He says, "Satan hindered us," or thwarted us. The term means "to stop; to prevent," and it was used to describe a common tactic of the Romans where they would dig huge trenches, especially in major roadways, to prevent the enemy from advancing. Now, we're not told the specifics of Satan's supernatural malevolent hindrances that prevented Paul from returning to them, but Paul certainly had an understanding of what they were and Paul was well acquainted with Satan's schemes as all leaders, especially pastors, become aware. He warns us in Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be

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able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Now, Satan's schemes can take on a myriad of forms. For example, in 2 Corinthians, we learned that Satan is the one that seeks to bring sin and animosity and unforgiveness into a church to disrupt its unity. We see that he can also accomplish disunity through legalism, everything from legalism to libertinism; everything from intolerance to excessive tolerance. It's for this reason that Paul confronted the church in Corinth in chapter 2, verse 11, he says, "in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan for we are not ignorant of his schemes."

You may recall that Scripture teaches us that Satan rules the orderly systems of this world in order to somehow thwart the purposes of God, and God will allow him to do that up to a point, and so if you want to see where Satan works, look at orderly systems, things like government, things like the educational system, things like entertainment, media, and so forth. We know from Scripture that he tempts everyone, even as he tempts the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that he opposes the true Gospel, and he blesses the false Gospel. Isn't it amazing? You see charlatans out there teaching things that are just absolutely absurd and people are walking over themselves to somehow get in to hear that stuff. We know that he inspires false teachers and influences false teachers. He even commits murders to accomplish his nefarious purposes. He blinds unbelievers. He seeks to deceive believers.

We also know from Scripture that he actually attacks individual churches and their leaders. We see this in the New Testament with respect to Corinth and Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira and Philadelphia. And, my friend, know that he will dig a trench to somehow prevent you from knowing the truth and living the truth. Sometimes he probably digs a trench on a Sunday morning just to keep you from coming to church, so to speak. He can distract us with busyness. He can tempt us so that all of a sudden we're drowning in debt, put you in contact with friends who will promote false teaching and so forth. And this is so why so many believers today are so pathetically ignorant of biblical truth, so conformed to this world, and so ineffective in ministry, so bereft of faith and hope and love. And he is a roaring lion that seeks victims to devour and therefore James tells us, we are told to, "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Submit to God, two things, and resist the devil and he will flee from you. He didn't say rebuke the devil. He didn't say renounce the devil. He didn't say bind Satan. There is no mystical incantations or any of that type of silly stuff. No going to some deliverance guru to somehow get Satan and the demons to stop doing all these terrible things. He says, "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

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Paul knew his enemy well. He knew that Satan was preventing him from personally going back to be with those that he loves and like a smart general that knows his enemy, he recognized Satan's handiwork. You know, I could name a dozen ways the enemy is attacking this church right now today. I have experienced things in this church you probably wouldn't believe if I were to tell you, if I were free to tell you, but I know this: that Satan cannot function outside the boundaries of his overruling providence. Moreover, I know from Scripture that God only allows him to oppose us for our good and his glory.

So what do you do when these things hit you? You do the next thing that God would have you do in the next few minutes, in the next hour, in the next day, and you just keep moving on and you let God handle those things. Job is a great illustration of this very thing, right? In fact, in 2 Corinthians 12 we learn how God allowed Satan to inflict Paul with what he called "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet," or literally, "harass me." A messenger, an *aggelos*, a demon is how it's translated. It's always used of a person or a demon. Given the context, given the term "messenger of Satan," this was probably in reference to a demonized ringleader of the false apostles who led the Corinthian conspiracy against Paul. And we know that three times Paul pleaded specifically with the Lord Jesus, the one who alone has authority over the demons, "Please, remove this from me!" But the Lord denied his request. Now, why would he allow Satan to do such a thing? Well, Paul answers the question, "to keep me from exalting myself." "God, now I understand. As painful as this is and I know Satan is behind it, I am going to trust you because I know that you're going to use this to keep me humble because that's not the thing that I tend to want to do on my own." And if you read the rest of that passage, you'll learn how he also wanted Paul to experience God's all-sufficient grace and power that is perfected in weakness.

So Paul knew what it was to trust in God's providence despite Satanic opposition. So, folks, know that when things get really bad and really bizarre and you don't know what in the world is going on, that God is ultimately in it; he is up to something in our lives that will ultimately bring great glory to himself and great joy to those who remain faithful in the fight.

And I want to say as a footnote: I'm far more concerned about the power of fallen flesh than I am the power of Satan, especially in my own life. I don't need Satan to mess up my life, I'm perfectly capable of doing it on my own. In fact, the greatest threat to churches today is not Satan and his minions, it's self-willed, ignorant pastors and undiscerning church members who buy Satanic lies and do his bidding. I recently heard from a very distraught individual who was lamenting over the fact that he could not find a church in his area for his family, and his family was just starving for the glory and the greatness of God and for the teaching of his word, for godly fellowship, and all of those things. And

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he gave a number of illustrations and he was talking about how that a lot of the people were getting together and they were renouncing and rebuking Satan and laying hands on the church building and where the pastor lived and all of this stuff. And then he gave the illustration of the pastor that said this and this was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back, the pastor said, "The reason Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding feast is because Jesus loves to party!!!" And the place just erupted in applause.

Folks, I have to digress for a moment. You must understand that that is not only ridiculous, that is blasphemous. Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding feast because in Matthew 22, Jesus likened the physical aspect of the coming kingdom to a wedding where he would be identified as the messianic bridegroom of his bridal church and he used the metaphor of the wine to describe the new order. It's for this reason it was part of the Passover feast. And all of that illustrated both the redeeming and cleansing nature of the blood of Christ. You see, Jesus' first miracle pointed to the Messiah as not only the Creator of all things physical, but the Creator of all things spiritual. It pointed to the new covenant of God's grace; to the new birth; to the new kingdom; to the work of redemption that was put on display when the Messiah came, all of that consistent with Old Testament prophecy. He was saying that the old economy of the Mosaic law with all of its rituals and ceremonies and cleansings for purification, all of that is no longer necessary. He was saying, "Put away your stone pots filled with water. I'm going to fill them with wine which not only gladdens the heart, but points to the once-for-all cleansing of my precious blood. I'm bringing you the new wine of the kingdom. I'm not making wine because I like to party." You see, folks, this is what Satan does. He promotes false doctrine but then people, because of their flesh, are drawn to those lies like a moth is drawn to a flame.

Well, Paul had to constantly battle with all manner of heresies, ridiculous superstitions, countless roadblocks that would impede his progress, but you never see him saying, "Hey, we need to stop here. I'm trying to get to Thessalonica. Satan is hindering us so we need to rebuke him. We need to renounce him. We need to bind him." No, he didn't do any of that. He simply resisted him firm in his faith and he knew that God had ordained to allow the enemy to oppose him for purposes that were way beyond his pay grade. Does that make sense to you? That's how I have to look at it a lot of times, "Lord, I don't know what you're up to. My goodness, is that ever crazy. Is that ever wrong. Is that ever painful. Is that ever Satanic. But, Lord, all I know to do is what I know to do and so I'm going to do it. I'm going to resist him firm in the faith. I'm not going to get distracted with all of it. You are God, I am not. I will trust you." And you know, I've lived long enough to see God do some amazing things after all of the chaos.

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Three Essential Ministry Perspectives

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20
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Love your flock despite varying levels of maturity. Trust in God's providence despite Satanic opposition. And finally, live in light of future reward despite the cost of discipleship. Notice verse 19, Paul says, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation?" Let's look at that, three words: hope, joy, crown of exultation. Who was the object of his hope on the day of Christ when according to Revelation 22:12, the Lord "will render to every man according to what he has done"? They were. Isn't that amazing? Who was the source of his eternal joy at the judgment seat of Christ? They were. Who would compromise his crown of exultation? The faithful believers at Thessalonica. You see, the crown, the term that is used here in the original language refers to the victor's wreath that was placed on the head of a victorious military commander or the winner of an athletic contest. It was also called the crown of pride. It signified great achievement. Paul is not speaking of some literal crown that he's going to wear around in heaven someday but the eternal reward that he calls a crown of exultation. He knows that when the fruits of his life and ministry are measured at the judgment seat of Christ, he will be found faithful to his calling, validated by the persevering faith of those Thessalonian believers and many others as well.

You see, the fact that they did not abandon their faith despite enormous opposition, caused him to celebrate. We know according to 1 Corinthians 3:13 that each man's work will become evident on that day and he said, "for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire," referring to the fire of God's discerning judgment, "and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss," the idea of loss of reward, "but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." That is, all that has been accomplished in the power of God and for his glory will survive. You see, Paul lived in light of that day. He lived in light of that eternal reward. He was motivated by that. Folks, can you imagine what it will be like some day to stand in the presence of his glory, as Jude says, blameless with great joy? And part of that joy is receiving the reward and hearing the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." And looking around and seeing the exhilarating faces of all those that you have led to Christ or disciplined or served or whatever. I mean, it's an amazing thought. This certainly motivated Paul to keep fighting despite the enormous cost of discipleship that eventually cost him his life. Verse 19, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."

Well, folks, I would ask you to ask yourself: do you love the church as Christ loved it? As Paul loved it? Despite all of our spiritual immaturity, all of our warts, all of our blemishes? And do you live in light of your eternal reward? Because, folks, please hear this: nothing else in life matters but what you do for Christ. Everything else is secondary

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or tertiary or fourthiary, I don't know what the word is there. Nothing else matters but what you do for Christ. Only what you accomplish for his glory will endure the purifying eye of holy omniscience. Everything else will be wood, hay and stubble. It'll just be burned up, so speak. It'll disappear forever like useless ash that is blown away in the wind. And I would you encourage you to examine your heart, those of you that know Christ. What is the great burden of my ministry? you need to ask yourself that. Do I truly love the people? Do I want to see them grow in Christ? Do I trust God in the midst of Satanic opposition? And do I live in light of eternity come what may? If the answer is yes, let's celebrate that but do even more, right? Excel even more.

And if the answer is, "You know, pastor, quite honestly, all of that is pretty foreign to me. I hear it, it sounds good. I'd like to say, boy, yeah, that really describes me, but that's not really true." If that's you and you truly know Christ, I don't have much time here and I just want to give you a very practical two word admonition here and a word of encouragement. Here's what you need to do: get involved. Get involved. Start serving the Lord. When Jesus asked Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" What did Jesus tell him to do? "Shepherd my sheep. Feed my flock." You see, love is action, not abstraction. You've got to get involved and here's what will happen: as you get involved in discipleship, as you get involved in serving in Awana or whatever it is, as you start mixing it up with other people - we had five couples over last night and it was wonderful to hear these testimonies - but as you get involved in the lives of people, do you know what's going to happen? God is going to bring a thrilling sense of his presence into your life. You're going to see more of your sin, more of the Savior. You're going to fall more in love with Christ and more in love with his people. You're going to become more effective. All of these things will come together because you were willing to get involved. Don't hang around on the periphery of the church. You're part of a body. A kidney is no good out there by itself. We need that kidney. You need the rest of the body. Get involved and watch what God will do.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that speak so practically to our hearts. I pray that by your grace you will help us to apply these things to our life in specific ways. We thank you that we do none of this to earn your love but, Lord, we seek to do it to enjoy your love, to enjoy your power, just the fellowship, just the joy of your presence and certainly for the reward that would be ours all to the praise of your glory. So we commit these truths to your sanctifying grace for it is in Christ's name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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