

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 “Divine Resources for Perseverance” May 21, 2023

I. Welcome & Review

A. Good morning! Ohaiyou gozaimasu! Welcome to Calvary Chapel Iwakuni. As always, it is a blessing to be here with you all to spend some time hearing from the Lord and His Word, and simply enjoying the blessing of His presence with us and the fellowship of one another.

1. *Welcome any new faces and those streaming online.*

B. Before we continue any further, let's go ahead and dismiss our elementary aged children to their Sunday School class.

1. *As well as the Bible English class (Second Service)*

C. As they make their way out, will the rest of you please open up your Bibles and make your way to chapter 2 of the book of 1 Thessalonians?

1. Last week we looked at the first 12 verses of chapter 2 in a message I entitled “The Model Ministers”.

a. In the opening of chapter 2, Paul seemed to be addressing some accusations about him and his companions and their ministry.

b. Based upon what Paul wrote it seemed as if the church in Thessalonica was facing a lot of public backlash for their faith in God.

c. Many people were coming against them and trying to discredit Paul and the message they had received from him.

d. Again, based upon what Paul wrote, it seemed as if there were people questioning Paul's motives, his message, and his methods.

e. People questioned his motives and seemed to suggest that Paul and his companions were nothing more than religious charlatans that had come through town in order to take from them, to get what

they could from the people of Thessalonica and then move on to the next city in order to swindle them out of whatever they could.

- f. They questioned his message. Paul preached a message that was quite contrary to what most in Thessalonica were used to.
 - i. The Gentile Greeks believed in many different gods, but Paul preached a message about the one true and living God.
 - ii. The Jews in Thessalonica believed in the one true and living God, but they rejected the message of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and their long-awaited Messiah.
 - iii. The message Paul preached was a message of grace, something foreign really to both the Greeks and the Gentiles.
 - g. They questioned his methods. People were accusing Paul of simply being a man-pleaser, of telling people something they wanted to hear. But Paul refuted such sentiments affirming that his goal all along was to please the Lord alone and how he didn't shy away from telling them the more challenging and difficult things.
 - h. In all they did, Paul and his companions were excellent examples to the church there in Thessalonica. They truly were model ministers to the church in Thessalonica.
2. This week, we pick up the continued account in chapter 2 as we see Paul transition away from defending himself and his ministry, to speaking about his heart for the church in Thessalonica.
 3. The church in Thessalonica was going through some difficulties.

- a. They were a young church, a new church, that didn't have a lot of spiritual leadership and mentorship after Paul and his companions were run out of town.
 - b. They were experiencing persecutions and sufferings because of their new faith in Christ. People were questioning them and ridiculing them and the message they had received.
 - c. And yet, despite these things going against them, God was doing an amazing work in them and through them.
4. Here in the rest of chapter 2 Paul speaks about how he is so thankful to God for the church in Thessalonica and he specifically notes the resources God had given to the church in order to help them through this difficult season they were in.
 5. These were resources that would help them as they continue to grow in their faith, as they continue to mature in the Lord. They are resources that are an important part of every church that desires to grow and mature through all the various seasons we face.
 6. The title of our study this morning is going to be "**Divine Resources for Perseverance**". Will you all rise to your feet in honor of God and His Holy Word? I'm going to read through our text from my Bible, do your best to follow along in your own Bible. Paul continues his letter to the Thessalonians with the following in verse 13 of chapter 2... (*R & P*)

II. Intro;

A. Paul opens up this section by mentioning the church in Thessalonica how he and his companions are constantly thanking God for this church, how they never stop thanking God for them.

1. The church in Thessalonica may have been wondering, what did they have to be so thankful for. They were experiencing a really difficult time. They were going

through a tough time. People were persecuting them, and people were calling into question Paul and his ministry. They were such a young, new church, babes in Christ, and they had no leader to help them grow, to help them mature.

2. In this chapter, I see Paul highlighting three divine resources that the church in Thessalonica had that were reason to give thanks. They were resources that would allow them to continue to grow, to continue to mature, and to eventually overcome this season of persecution.
3. These resources God had given to them were resources that would allow them to persevere, to not give up in the face of trials and difficulties, and all the other things seemingly working against them.
4. These same resources God made available to the church in Thessalonica are even made available to us as well. So, as we go through and note these resources, we'll look to make application as to how these resources can be used to help us persevere and not give up; to continue to grow and mature into all the Lord has for us.

B. With that, we'll turn our attention to the first divine resource Paul mentioned in verse 13. Read it again with me.

III. 1 Thessalonians 2:13;

A. As already noted, Paul opens up by once again reminding the church how they are constantly in their prayers, how they are constantly thanking God for them.

1. In chapter 1 Paul wrote similarly how he and his companions give thanks to God always for [them] all, remembering without ceasing [their] work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope. (**1 Thes. 1:2-3a**)
2. In fact, the divine resources that we are going to highlight will be connected with their work of faith, their

labor of love, and their patience of hope in the Lord. These things Paul was so thankful to God for.

B. Now the first divine resource that Paul mentions is spoken of here in verse 13. It is **the Word of God**. When he came to them, Paul preached to them the gospel message, the Word of God.

1. The gospel message according to Romans 1:16 is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. (**Rom. 1:16**)
2. For the church in Thessalonica they were founded upon the Word of God. They received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit, as Paul stated in chapter 1. (**1 Thes. 1:6b**)
3. But the same gospel message that saved them is also the same gospel message that would enable them to live for Christ and endure sufferings, to persevere through the affliction.

C. Paul mentioned that this church received the word of God which they heard from Paul and his companions.

1. The Greek word for received is the word “paralambano”. It means to take with one’s self, to join to one’s self. The idea is that the word of God became **part of who they were**, it was knit together into the very fabric of their being, it was taken in and became part of them.
2. Hearing the word of God is important. Coming to church and listening to the Word, listening to an audio bible, or perhaps taking in a podcast of one of your favorite bible teachers or preachers is a good thing. We need to be those who hear the Word of God. But I want to remind you of what Jesus had to say about hearing.
 - a. Jesus often warned people about the wrong kind of hearing. He warned people, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (**Mt. 13:9**)

- b. Most the people Jesus was speaking to when he gave these warnings had physical ears. So, Jesus wasn't necessarily saying we have to simply have ears to hear. But that we would have discerning ears, ears that didn't just hear, but understood what was being said and responded appropriately.
- c. Jesus warned, "Take heed what you hear." (**Mk 4:24a**)
- i. When you take in and hear the word of God, do you ever stop to contemplate exactly what it is you are hearing. This is God's inspired Word, God's love letter written to us. Inspired by God and written by holy men moved by the Holy Spirit; it was written to us and for us.
 - ii. Do you understand the weight of what you hold in your lap? It is a miracle of God. His very word given to us.
 - iii. If after church today, an asteroid from heaven came bursting through the sky and landed in our parking lot and attached to it was a metallic envelope that had the words on it, "To Calvary Chapel Iwakuni, from God, open and read next Sunday." How many of you would come with excitement and anticipation to hear God's letter to us next week? How many of you would spend the next week telling everyone you know about how you were going to open a letter from God written just for us? How many of you would make sure that nothing would get in the way of you coming to hear that letter from God?
 - iv. We may think "Wow, that would be amazing, there's no way I'd miss that". But let me tell you something, the Bible you hold in your hand is no less a miracle than what an asteroid from heaven with an attached note from God is. This is God's Holy Word given to us.

- d. Jesus warned not only about what you hear, but He also warned, “Take heed how you hear.” (Lk. 8:18)
- i. How do you hear the Word of God? Do you take it in attentively and expectantly? When you hear the Word of God are you doing so with a heart and mind that is open and ready to receive all God has to say to you.
 - ii. You know, I love to see people at Calvary come with pen and paper in hand, or people that have their notes app opened up on their phone or tablet. It tells me something, well assuming they aren’t just bringing it to doodle on or playing games on, it tells me that they are expecting to hear something important, something worth writing down, something worth noting.
 - iii. It tells me they are coming ready to receive all that the Spirit of God desires to say to them and to His church.
 - iv. When you come to hear the word of God, how do you do so? Do you expect to hear from God? Are you ready to receive from Him? Are you ready to take what you receive and apply it to your life and allow it to mold and shape you into the image of Christ?
 - v. Or are you a careless hearer of the Word? You come and hear the word, but it goes in one ear and out the other. Or you take it in and listen, but the second you step out of the church you immediately forget it and start thinking about what’s for lunch and all the other important things that will fill the rest of the day.
- e. It isn’t enough just to come to church and check a box and say we listened to the message. Jesus wants us to hear the Word, but also warns us about what we hear and how we hear it.

3. He wants us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers of the word.

a. To take God's Word and receive it to ourselves, to take it in and make it part of who we are. That it would be knit into the very fabric of who we are just like it was for the church in Thessalonica.

D. Paul also speaks of how they welcomed the word of God, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

1. Now in English, the words receive and welcome can be used somewhat interchangeably. They basically mean the same thing. But in the Greek this word "welcome" is different from the word "receive".

2. The word in the Greek carries with it the idea of receiving something favorably, to delight in receiving something, or to appreciate something that has been given to one's self.

a. The church in Thessalonica didn't just take it in the word of God and make it part of who they were, they took it in and cherished it; they delighted in it, **they greatly appreciated it.** Why?

b. Well our text tells us, because they understood it to be the very word of God, and that it was truth.

i. In today's world, truth is said to be in the eye of the beholder. We have allowed ourselves to believe that truth is fluid, that it is relative. That what's truth to you, may not be truth to another person. It's all relative.

ii. But that simply isn't true. There is truth. God's Word is truth. John 17:17 states, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." God's word is truth. It is absolute. (**Jn. 17:17**)

iii. When Jesus was brought before Pilate, Pilate questioned him about His coming and His kingdom and Jesus responded, "For this cause I

was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.” (**Jn. 18:37**)

- iv. And do you recall Pilate’s response? He dismissed Jesus’ words and simply questioned “What is truth?” (**Jn. 18:38**)
- v. Many people today think they can simply balk at the idea of truth like Pilate did, but that isn’t the case. God’s word is truth.
- c. You know what else is truth? Jesus Christ is truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (**Jn. 14:6**)
- d. Now the correlation between Jesus and the Word of God is astounding.
 - i. Jesus is the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us. (**Jn. 1:14a**). He is the living word, and God’s word is the written word.
- e. Both are described as bread.
 - i. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God according to Mt. 4:4 (**Mt. 4:4**)
 - ii. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (**Jn. 6:48**)
- f. Both are light.
 - i. Psalm 119:105 states, “Your word is a lamp to my fee and a light to my path.” (**Ps. 119:105**)
 - ii. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” (**Jn. 8:12a**)
- g. Both are eternal
 - i. Jesus Christ is the eternal God in the flesh.
 - ii. And the word of God lives and abides forever. It will endure forever according to 1 Peter 1:23 & 25. (**1 Pt. 1:25a**)

3. The word of God and Jesus are so closely related that the manner in which you love and appreciate Jesus, ought to correlate to your love and appreciation for God's Word.

a. We often say or speak about how we love Jesus.

And how thankful we are for Jesus. But do we love His Word? And are we thankful for His Word?

b. The way a Christian appreciates God's Word will be in direct correlation to how He appreciates God's Son. For they are the same. Jesus is the Word of God become flesh. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (Jn. 1:1)

c. This is speaking about Jesus Christ. In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God [He was with God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit], and Jesus was God.

E. Looking back at our text we see that Paul also mentioned how the word of God was effectively working in them, in all who believe in fact.

1. That phrase, "effectively works" is actually one word in the Greek. It is the word "energeo". We can almost hear it in the English. It is where our English word energy comes from.

2. It speaks of the energy, the power, and might to make something work. Here it is speaking of the power of God's word to work in us.

3. God's word has the power to touch hearts and transform lives.

4. And here we see a very important element to the resource of God's word. You see we need to appropriate God's word to ourselves, to take it in to ourselves. And we also need to appreciate God's Word, the gift it is to us. But **we also must apply God's word** to our lives.

5. If we take it in, and appreciate it, but never apply it, never allow it to mold and shape us, we are missing the mark. We need to do all these things with the Word of God; to appropriate it to ourselves, to appreciate it, and to apply it. All are part of the necessary response to God's Word.

6. All of these things were part of how the Thessalonians responded to God's Word and they give to us an excellent example to follow.

F. Well, let's continue in our text and note the next resource God had given to the church in Thessalonica to help them persevere. Read verses 14-16 with me.

IV. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16;

A. Earlier in chapter 1, Paul spoke of how the church in Thessalonica had become followers of Paul and his companions, and also followers of the Lord. (**1 Thes. 1:6a**). Here we see that they have become followers or imitators (it's the same Greek word) of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.

1. And this brings to light the second divine resource God had given to the church in Thessalonica. They not only had the word of God, but they also had **the church of God** to help them, to encourage them, to come alongside them.

B. The church in Thessalonica was experiencing some difficulties; persecutions and trials, challenges. And they shouldn't have been shocked by this.

1. For when we hear the Word of God and take it in to our very being, and we appreciate it and cherish it, when we start to apply it to our lives so that it creates lasting change, it will inevitably result in people treating us differently.

2. We may have friends or family members that begin to mock us, or shun us, or even disown us because of our faith in God.

3. This is normal. This is to be expected. Jesus said this would happen.
 - a. He said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” (**Jn. 15:18-20a**)
 - b. In His sermon on the mount Jesus stated, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (**Mt. 5:10-12**)
 - c. In John’s gospel Jesus proclaimed, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (**Jn. 16:33**)
4. Paul understood this truth about persecution. He experienced it himself on numerous occasions.
 - a. He wrote a long list of the various trials and afflictions and persecutions he faced because of the gospel in 2 Corinthians. Time won’t allow us to look them over. But there were a lot.
 - b. He wrote to Timothy trying to encourage and comfort him regarding the difficulties he was facing. He wrote, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (**2 Tim. 3:12**)
 - c. If you allow God’s word to work in your life and produce a change in your life, **you will suffer persecution**. It is a promise from the Lord. It isn’t

one we may like or claim as our life verse, but it is nonetheless a promise from God.

C. These Thessalonians were experiencing the same sort of trials and afflictions that the churches in Judea were experiencing.

1. For just as the Jews in Jerusalem were being persecuted by their own countrymen, so too were the Thessalonians being persecuted by their own people; both the Jews in Thessalonica and the Greeks there as well. They were all coming against them.
2. Paul wrote these words to encourage them and to comfort them. What they were experiencing wasn't something they were being singled out for from everyone else. They experienced the same kind of persecution others had for their faith in Christ.
 - a. They didn't have to worry or wonder if they had done something wrong or bad, or perhaps that they weren't doing things right.
 - b. There can be a tendency to think to ourselves that we must be doing something wrong if things aren't working out and we come against opposition.
 - c. But that simply isn't the truth. In fact, it may be the opposite. If things are constantly going smooth for you and you aren't ever experiencing any sort of trials or difficulties for your faith, it may be an indication of something that is a little off. For we should experience opposition, we should experience trials and difficulties; that is the norm for those who follow Jesus.
 - d. If you are going through difficulties and trials and seem to be facing all sorts of opposition related to your walk with the Lord, it could be an indicator that you are headed in the right direction; that you are doing the right things. So don't give up. Keep moving forward in the Lord as He leads and guides.

3. The church in Judea would then become an encouragement to them. They had gone through the same thing. They were not alone.
 - a. When we go through trials and persecutions and afflictions, God comes alongside us and comforts us. He leads us through those times and seasons, and we grow through them.
 - b. He comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.” (2 Co. 1:4-5)
4. God has given us the church that they may be able to come alongside us and **comfort us, and encourage us**. That we may comfort one another as we go through similar life experiences.
 - a. We are able to minister to people in the same manner and way that God ministered to us. We get to share our life experiences with one another and share our testimonies of God’s goodness and faithfulness even in the most challenging of circumstances.
5. The church in Jerusalem experienced great persecution from their own countrymen, but what came of that persecution was God spreading the gospel to the rest of the world. (Acts 1:8)
 - a. God had told His disciples to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the world. But they kind of delayed in getting that going. They tarried in Jerusalem for quite a while.
 - b. And it wasn’t until the persecution in Jerusalem began to get so severe that they then decided to spread out, and when they did, they took the gospel with them.

- c. Acts 8:1 informs us that “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,” (**Acts 8:1**)
- d. Acts 1:8 didn’t happen until Acts 8:1 took place and the church felt the great persecution against them that scattered them to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, like the seaport of Thessalonica.
- e. God used the persecution of the church in Jerusalem to spread His gospel message, to impact the kingdom of heaven. And the church in Thessalonica could take similar comfort in knowing that God could and would use their persecution to spread His gospel message even further, to have an even greater impact upon the kingdom of heaven.

D. Now, in verses 15-16, Paul speaks about the Jews in Judea and their opposition against the gospel.

1. He writes how the Jews killed both the Lord Jesus Christ and their own prophets, in addition to persecuted Paul and his companions.
2. Now when Paul speaks of the Jews here, he isn’t lumping all the Jews together. We now and understand that the main opposition came from the Jewish religious leaders; the scribes, the elders, the Pharisees and the like. They were the ones that came against Jesus and His ministry.
 - a. Much of what we read in the gospel accounts is how many of the Jews gladly received Jesus. Jesus was followed by great multitudes of Jews that believed.
 - b. So this isn’t Paul trying to put blame on the entire Jewish nation for what happened to Jesus.
 - c. We know that the Jews, the religious leaders, were definitely a big part of the crucifixion of Jesus, but they were not alone. The Romans also played their part. They too were responsible for the death of

Jesus. So it wasn't just the Jews, but the Gentiles as well.

- d. In fact, while we're at it, we may as well throw ourselves in there as well. We were partly responsible for the death of Jesus Christ.
 - i. Jesus Christ went to the cross of Calvary and gave up His life as a sacrifice for our sins. He died in our place. He paid our price. We are just as responsible for Jesus dying on the cross as the next person.
 - ii. The Scriptures affirm that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. (**Rom. 3:23**)
 - iii. And because we are all sinners and Jesus went to the cross to pay the debt for the sins of all humanity, then **we each played a part in His death.**

3. We see here as well that the opposition of the Jews was not pleasing to God. God was not pleased when He saw Jewish brothers and sisters coming against each other and persecuting one another.
 - a. I think this ought to be received as a warning for us. We must realize too that God is not pleased when we come against our own brothers and sisters in the Lord.
 - b. We're all part of the same body. There's only one body of Christ. 1 Corinthians tells us, "But now indeed there are many members, yet one body." (**1 Co. 12:20**)
 - c. When we turn our noses at other churches, or we bad mouth other churches and other believers because they don't do things the same way we do them, this is not pleasing to the Lord.
 - d. God is not pleased when we come against one another. We're on the same team. We're all part of the body of Christ and when we come against one

another we only end up harming ourselves, we only end up persecuting the body of Christ which we are part of.

- e. So don't do it. Who cares if they do things a little different from us.
 - i. Who cares if they wear suits and ties, or fancy robes. Who cares if they only like to sing hymns, or if they don't use instruments in their worship, or they use too many instruments.
 - ii. Who cares if they are more demonstrative in their faith than we are, or if they only read the KJV of the Bible, or if they believe in the gifts of the Spirit or don't believe in them. Who cares if they are pre-trib, post-trib, mid-trib, or no trib.
 - iii. If they agree upon the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith, that Jesus is the Son of God and equal to God, that He lived a perfect sinless life and that He laid down that life upon the cross of Calvary to pay the penalty for our sins and that He subsequently rose from the dead defeating sin and they confess that we are saved by the grace of God through faith in God, well then, they are part of the body of Christ and we shouldn't oppose one another or come against one another.
 - f. Different doesn't mean wrong. Every part of the body is a needed part and we do harm to ourselves and **we displease God when we come against each other.**
4. Paul also mentions how the persecution from the Jews was in direct opposition to the salvation of others. Paul and his companions wanted to spread the gospel to the Gentiles, but the Jews opposed that, they didn't want to see Gentiles saved.
- a. We have to realize something about the Jews of that day and their relationship with the Gentiles. Despite

popular opinion, the Jews weren't opposed to the Gentiles coming to faith in God. They proselytized Gentiles during this time.

- b. The big concern amongst most Jewish religious leaders was the thought that Gentiles could become believers in God without first becoming Jewish.
 - i. The Jews believed that the only way to become a true believer in the Lord and be accepted by Him was to become Jewish, to become a proselyte to Judaism.
 - ii. But Paul and his companions were going out telling Gentiles that they didn't need to convert to Judaism in order to be accepted by God. That they only had to put their hope and faith in Jesus Christ and they would be accepted.
 - iii. This was completely contrary to the Jewish religious leaders' teachings and traditions. And so they opposed Paul and the other apostles. They opposed the salvation of others because it didn't fit with their own traditions and beliefs.
5. Paul described how their opposition to the salvation of the Gentiles led to their storing up of wrath for themselves.
- a. God's wrath has come against those who oppose the gospel this much is true. But the opposite of that is also equally true. Receiving the gospel brings salvation.
 - b. And so we are left with a choice. We can oppose the gospel and bring God's wrath upon ourselves, or we can receive the gospel and bring God's salvation upon ourselves.
 - c. There is no middle ground with Christianity. It is either one or the other. You are either for Christ or against Him. You either gather with Him or scatter

abroad according to Jesus' own words found in Matthew 12:30. (**Mt. 12:30**)

d. **We must choose Christ.** You cannot remain neutral or undecided. If you have not chosen to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ then you are in opposition to Him and you are storing up wrath against yourself. A wrath that God will pour out in His perfect timing.

e. Do not delay. Respond to the gospel while you still have the opportunity to do so.

E. Well, let's look to our final section this morning in verses 17-20 where we note one more divine resource the church in Thessalonica had to help them persevere. Read with me verses 17-20.

V. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20;

A. In verses 17 & 18 Paul talks about his absence from them and his desire to be with them.

1. When he writes about being taken away from them he is referencing the fact that they had to escape the city rather quickly because of the persecution and uproar created by some envious Jews in the area. They ended up fleeing under the cover of night.
2. The word he used here is very descriptive. The phrase, "having been taken away" is actually one word in the Greek. It's only used this one time in all of the NT.
 - a. The word in the Greek is "aporphanizo" [ap-or-fan-id-zo]. The word comes from the Greek preposition "apo" which means "from" and "orphanos" which speaks of an orphan.
 - b. The picture this word paints is that of someone being orphaned from their family. It can speak of a child being separated from their parents, or parents being separated from their children.

- c. We know that Paul felt and acted like a spiritual parent to these believers in Thessalonica. He nourished them like a nursing mother nourishes her own baby and he protected and provided for them, speaking truth into their life like a father does his own children.
 - d. The fact that he couldn't be there with them was something that was tearing him up. He felt like he had been stripped away from his own children. And he desperately longed to be reunited with them.
3. Paul described this absence from them as a short time and this leads me to the last divine resource God had given to the church. He had given them the word of God, the church of God, but here the idea is that of their **future with God**.
 4. Paul wanted to let them know that this was a short time. That it was temporary and he eventually finishes off the chapter by looking to the eternal and their presence with Jesus Christ.
- B. Though Paul was absent from them in body, his heart was right there with them. His heart longed to be with them.
1. He greatly desired to see them face to face, to be able to comfort them and care for them. In fact, he tried to come time and again. Multiple times he tried to make the trip back to Thessalonica, but each time he tried he was hindered from doing so.
 2. Paul says that it was Satan himself who was hindering him from coming back to them. I think this begs the question of how Satan hindered him. But Paul doesn't give us the specifics of how Satan did this.
 - a. It could have been through any number of ways. Perhaps illness struck Paul or some of his companions, perhaps funds were tight and they couldn't afford to go. Maybe other things kept

popping up preventing them from coming. Perhaps the way was blocked.

- b. That seems to be the indication based upon the wording used here. The word “hindered” literally describes the work of breaking up the road and putting up obstacles in order to impede one’s progress.
 - c. This was a military maneuver used to impede oncoming forces. You’d see the way in which the opposition was planning on traveling and you would go and break up the roadway and put up all sorts of obstacles to detour them or reroute them a different way.
3. Now, I’d like to note a few simple things here about Satan’s work of hindering Paul and his desire to return to Thessalonica before we continue.
- a. First of all, I think it important that we note that Satan is in fact real.
 - i. He is described as the god [little “g”] of this age who has blinded the minds of those who do not believe in 2 Corinthians. (**2 Co. 4:4**)
 - ii. He is referred to as the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience in Ephesians. (**Eph. 2:2**)
 - iii. He is referred to as being like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour by Peter in his 1st epistle. (**1 Pt. 5:8**)
 - b. Another important thing for us to realize is that while Satan is real, he is not equal to God. He is a created being.
 - i. He is one of the angels that God created in heaven. But he became prideful and tried to lift himself up in the place of God and because of his actions he was kicked out of heaven, along with a third of the angels. These fallen angels we more

commonly refer to as demons, which are also very real.

- ii. But it is important to note that Satan is not God's counterpart. God has no equals. Satan is not God's adversary he is not divine in nature. He is not omnipotent, or omniscient, He is limited in what He can do.
- c. This leads to another important thing we must realize and that has to do with the fact that his leash is only as long as God allows it to be.
 - i. Meaning, there isn't anything that Satan can do that God isn't aware of and that God does not first give the ok on.
 - ii. We see this exemplified in the life of Job. Satan could do nothing to Job without God's knowing and without God's allowance.
 - iii. That means that this hindrance of Satan's was something that God permitted to happen. God allowed Satan to keep Paul from returning to Thessalonica.
 - iv. Now this brings up something I find quite fascinating. Many Bible scholars believe that the letter of 1 Thessalonians was the first letter that Paul wrote to any of the churches.
 - v. Paul wrote this letter while in Corinth because he couldn't go see the Thessalonians face to face himself. If he would have been permitted to go to Thessalonica, we may not have the book of 1 Thessalonians.
 - vi. In fact, we may not have much of the NT. If this hindrance to get to Thessalonica was the catalyst to get Paul to start writing letters to the various churches throughout the area that he longed to be with but couldn't be for whatever reason, then it could be that without it Paul may have never

developed the habit of sitting down and writing letters. And we would be without half of the books of the NT.

vii. And this reminds of a very important principle. When one door closes, **we must believe and trust that God has a different, better door** that He wants us to go through.

viii. God used this hindrance of Satan to get Paul to sit down and write the letter we have before us. And potentially to write all the letters of Paul we have before us.

ix. I wonder if Satan regretted hindering Paul from going to Thessalonica. It looks like God used it for His glory and the greater good of the kingdom of heaven.

C. In verses 19 & 20 Paul speaks about how the church in Thessalonica is their hope, their joy, and their crown of rejoicing.

1. When Paul and his companions thought about the church in Thessalonica being in the presence of Christ at His coming it was more than they could ever dream of or ask for.

2. Paul's all was in the churches future with the Lord in heaven. It didn't matter what they were going through now, it didn't matter that they were being persecuted, that he was hindered from going to be with them; those things were temporary. The most important thing to them was the fact that they were going to be with Jesus for all of eternity.

3. Their **focus was upon the eternal and not the temporary**. They found their hope, their joy, their rejoicing in knowing that they were going to be with Jesus forever.

a. John writes in his third epistle, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 Jn. 4)

- b. As a spiritual parent to the church in Thessalonica, I think Paul would agree with John. He had no greater joy than knowing that those in Thessalonica would one day be welcomed into the presence of Jesus Christ where they would walk with Him for the rest of eternity.
4. One of the keys to overcoming trials and difficulties and persecutions is to get our eyes off of our temporary circumstances and to place our gaze upon the Lord and our glorious future we have awaiting us.
- a. It was Paul who wrote, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (**2 Co. 4:17-18**)
 - b. May our hope and focus be upon the eternal, upon us one day entering into the presence of the Lord and worshipping Him for all our days. Amen? Amen. Let’s pray.