



Seized Before the Day

“Mental Patience”

Are you afraid to pray for patience?

You might be since the Bible says, "tribulation works patience" (Romans 5:3). You'd essentially be praying for tribulation.

Suffering certainly produces patience when it is endured. There's even an old expression, "the patience of Job," based on his having to endure suffering of such magnitude for so long.

The patience of Job is only one kind of patience. There is another. It's in verse five - "the patience of Christ."

It is a patience we definitely want to pray for and see produced in our lives.

2Th 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you,

Paul thought it important that believers "pray" for the furthering of the Gospel. If for no other reason, it calls us back to our priorities.

There are a lot of things we can be passionate about; a lot of things to discuss that are important. None is as important as the Gospel; none should capture our passion more.

He depicted "the word of The Lord" as if it was a runner pursuing his or her course. "Run" is in a present tense, meaning to keep on running. He may have been thinking not of a marathon but of long-distance running over varied terrain. Though there may be obstacles, the runner may yet be "swift" and make steady, sure progress.

"That the word of The Lord... be glorified" is the intended result. The Gospel is glorified when it changes hearts and lives and you see its transforming power at work in those who receive it.

"Just as it is with you" reminds us that the Thessalonians were an example of exactly what Paul was praying for. Paul had only been in Thessalonica for three Sabbaths. But in that short time a number of people were saved, their lives totally transformed, so much so that word of their conversions was spreading all over the empire.

The Word of The Lord had indeed run swiftly through Thessalonica and been glorified; and now Paul wanted that same result everywhere he went with the Gospel.

Paul was writing from Corinth and there were problems brewing. The account of his time in Corinth is in Acts 18. After teaching in the synagogue for a time, the Jews rose up to oppose him. Paul literally shook the dust off of his garments. Paul did this so that not a speck of dust from the synagogue would remain on his clothes, much less his sandals. This was a dramatic way of expressing his rejection of their rejection.

The Lord then appeared to Paul in a vision and what He said to His apostle is insightful.

“Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (v9-11).

Apparently, he was "afraid," either keeping or considering keeping "silent," and concerned about his safety.

It always encourages me to see that the heroes and heroines of the faith are men and women of like passions with us.

You know the expression, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"? With apologies to F.D.R., I'm not so sure!

There is plenty to be afraid of, and we will see what troubled Paul in a moment.

The Lord can alleviate those fears and encourage us to press on. Prayer helps.

2Th 3:2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

"Unreasonable" is an unfortunate translation. It is a word that describes outrageous conduct.

"Wicked" has to do with their character. They were evil and capable of any manner of monstrous actions against Paul and his companions.

They did not "have faith." They were nonbelievers taken captive by the devil to do his will in trying to hinder the swift spread of the Gospel.

2Th 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

Faithless men cannot ultimately hinder the Gospel. It's important you qualify it by saying "ultimately" because there are a lot of obstacles faithless men can construct. After all, Paul had been

run out of Thessalonica. Then the same guys who chased him out followed him to the next town.

The Thessalonians were themselves suffering so much that when it was suggested to them they might already be in the Great Tribulation, they could believe it.

"Establish" can mean a lot of things. Let's see what it meant to Paul.

Paul only knew one speed and only had one heading. He was full speed ahead ministering the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. If one door closed, he went through another. If he was incarcerated, he wrote letters. If he was stoned to death, when raised he wanted to go back and talk to his murderers.

Paul's life was not just submitted to Jesus. He was subordinate to the Gospel. Nothing was more important to him than its spread.

Jesus can also "guard you from the evil one." Sometimes it can seem He is not a very good guard. More like a mall cop than the Secret Service. That's because things happen to us that we don't really approve of.

At least, we don't approve of them happening to us. When we read about them happening to other believers, we applaud them for their endurance under fire from the devil.

Take almost any of the accounts in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, for example. When Polycarp was being burned at the stake in Smyrna, he wouldn't burn. So they stabbed him - but then his blood extinguished the flames. He finally died to the glory of God.

Glorious - as long as nothing like that comes my way.

God's "guard" over us is far more spiritual than it is physical. He keeps us spiritually safe in the midst of physical suffering as we yield to Him.

2Th 3:4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.

This verse - these few words - are an absolute gem. They express something so profound it's easy to overlook.

In context, beginning with verse six Paul is going to deliver to the church a series of exhortations. Some of them were blowing it and needed to repent and obey The Lord.

We can lift this verse out of its immediate context and let it speak volumes to us.

"That you do and will do the things we command you." Since Paul was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we could paraphrase that by saying, "that you do and will do the things God commands you by His Word."

Let me give you an example of how profound, how far reaching, are those words. A couple wants to get married. They are both believers. We recommend premarriage counseling, which is essentially a series of meetings in which we can go over what the Bible says about the roles of husband and wife, about marriage, about children - all that stuff.

All of the premarital counsel in the world is useless each of the parties in the marriage "do and will do [in the future] the things God commands you by His Word."

How can I know what I'm going to do in the future? If I'm a Christian, I'm going to do what is directed by the Bible. Every time.

Marriage counseling often fails, not because the counseling isn't good, but because one or both parties refuses to do the things God commands in His Word. It doesn't make them happy; it doesn't 'work' for them.

The real issue is, Do you belong to The Lord or not?

I'm even willing to concede you may not be as happy on earth as you might be; whatever that means.

You know where you want to be happy? Before the Reward Seat of Jesus Christ.

Did it make Jesus happy to go to the Cross? He did it for the joy that was set before Him - the salvation of those who would trust in Him for eternal life.

These words are some of the most important in all the Bible - at least for us to have as our philosophy of life.

2Th 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

This is Paul's third prayer for them in this letter.

"Direct" conveys the idea of getting you to a desired end or goal. In this case there are two: "the love of God" and "the patience of Christ."

Does Paul mean their love for God? Or does he mean God's love for them? Either is possible, according to language scholars; so let's say God means both.

In a nutshell, the prayer is that their hearts would be directed to consider God's love for them that it might inspire growth in their love for God.

We want to be all about what God has done and is doing for you, rather than what you ought to be doing for Him. Love is our greatest motivation - God's love for us.

As far as "patience," does Paul mean the patient endurance of Jesus? Or does he mean their patience waiting for Jesus to rapture them?

Again, either is possible, so we see both as being true.

Jesus certainly displayed endurance as He lived every day of His life anticipating the Cross. Think just about the first thirty years of His life on the earth. What happened in those years?

Almost nothing.

The creator of the universe lived day-by-day in obscurity, working with woods and rocks and metals He had spoken into existence.

Jesus' life was all about patience.

And we must remain patient waiting for The Lord to take us home. Impatience because He hasn't yet returned for us will get us off the path that leads to eternal life.

We used to sing, "we must wait... Wait... Wait on The Lord." It's great spiritual advice.