

The Legacy of Encouragement
1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

Introduction

Letters from little old lady from Immanuel Baptist Church—never met her

1. We've been talking about living our lives in a way that leaves a legacy.
2. Last week we talked about the legacy of ministry
3. The week before that we talked about the legacy of imitation
4. This week we are going to discuss the legacy of encouragement
5. Defining encouragement:
 - a) The word translated encouragement in the NT is parakaleo and it is used 139 times (noun and verb)
 - b) When we think of encouragement we general think of lifting someone's spirits
 - c) But it is very broad an includes asking, appealing, inviting, summoning, requesting, urging, begging, encouraging, appealing to, consoling, comforting and cheering someone up.
 - d) So, in the truest biblical sense of the word, to encourage someone implies doing more than simply lifting their spirits; it includes appealing to their will or trying to move them

A. Encouragement is born out of a deep love for people and a desire to be involved in their lives (2:17-20)

1. Even when Paul was away from the churches he planted they were still on his mind (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.”**
 - a. He may have been away from them physically, but not in spirit
 - b. He was “eager” to see them again
 - c. He repeats this in 3:9-10: **“For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”**
2. Even though he had faced severe persecution in Thessalonica, he still tried to return to on multiple occasions (18): **“For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan hindered us.”**
3. We see in this that one of Paul's great joys in life was a deep love for God's people and being involved in their lives (19-20): **“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.”**
 - a) They were his **“hope”**
 - b) They were his **“joy”**—or delight
 - c) They were his **“crown of exultation”**--this means he liked to brag about them!!
 - d) They were his **“glory”**

B. Encouragement benefits both the one who gives it and the one who receives it (3:1-10)

1. The Thessalonians benefitted by Paul's desire to encourage them (1-4)

- a. He couldn't wait to do encourage and strengthen them (1a): **"Therefore when we could endure it no longer,"**
 - 1) I LOVE this phrase because it forms a wonderful word-picture in Greek
 - 2) The word for endure strictly refers to covering something to protect, conceal or keep it secret
 - 3) Some lexicons suggest it was used to refer to cover something to keep water out
 - 4) So the picture we get is that Paul was anxious to get back to Thessalonica but when that didn't work out he just couldn't take it anymore so he sent Timothy
 - 5) I think the CSB captures this best: **"when we could no longer stand it..."**

- b. This was so important to Paul that he was willing to stay at Athens alone (1b-2): **"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..."**
 - 1) Having ministry partners with him was extremely important due to not just the work, but the dangers he faced
 - 2) Yet, he sent Timothy to Thessalonica and Silvanus to Phillipi
 - 3) Luke may have still be with Paul since he used the third person plural (**"we thought it best to be left behind..."**)

- c. When Timothy got to Thessalonica he had a two-fold purpose (2b): **"to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,"**
 - 1) The Greek word *steridzo* (strengthen) means to fix something in place so that it remains immovable. Figuratively it means to be unchanging in belief
 - 2) The word for encourage, *parakaleo*, refers to remaining faithful to their convictions in the midst of the persecution they were facing

Swimming the 500—twirling towels, walking along the edge, swinging the counters

- 3) Paul wanted to make sure the persecution there were facing didn't derail their faith (3-4): **"so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know."**
 - a) The word **"disturbed"** here literally refers to the wagging of an animal's tail
 - b) Figuratively it refers to being carried away and controlled by something, like fear or emotions

Maxx—trying to force his way out the door to see his "friends" (claw marks on the deck), or jumping up when I hug Amy in the kitchen—his "emotions" get the best of him

- c) In this case, Paul was concerned that the persecution that the Thessalonians faced might shake or disturb them and their new found faith in Jesus
- d) So, he sent Timothy to remind them that Christians are "destine" for afflictions, and that he had warned them about this ahead of time

2. Just as Paul's actions to encourage the Thessalonians were of benefit to them, there was also a benefit to Paul himself (5-10)
 - a. Remember, Paul deeply loved God's people and was constantly concerned over their well being
 - b. He was especially concerned over the Thessalonians wondering if the persecution they faced would be too much for them (5): **"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"**
 - 1) Remember, they were baby Christians
 - 2) Paul had only been there three weeks
 - 3) Paul, Timothy and Silas were run out of town by the Jews
 - 4) They were then arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison
 - 5) Can you imagine what these brand new Thessalonian Christians were facing and why Paul was so concerned?
 - 6) Can you imagine the constant emotional weight Paul felt as he thought about them without knowing how they were doing (they didn't have phones, email, texting)
 - c. But Timothy returned with great news!! (6): **"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,"**
 - 1) The Thessalonians were holding firm
 - 2) They were strong in their faith and their love for one another
 - 3) They even desired to see Paul as much as he desired to see them
 - d. This news brought tremendous encouragement (parakaleo again) to Paul even in the midst of his own personal distress and affliction (7-10)
 - 1) Their faithfulness in the midst of persecution encouraged Paul (7): **"for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;"**
 - 2) It enlivened Paul's spirits (8): **"for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord."**
 - 3) It brought joy and thanksgiving (9): **"For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,"**
 - 4) It made Paul want to visit them all the more and minister to them (10): **"as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?"**
3. That's the way encouragement works—as we encourage others, we ourselves are encouraged!

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| C. Encouragement has holiness as its ultimate goal (3:11-13) |
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1. These verses are actually the end of the introduction to Paul's letter
2. He asks God for two things:
 - a. That He might make it possible for Paul to return to Thessalonica (11): **"Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;"**
 - b. That He might cause them to grow in their love for one another and all men (12): **"and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;"**

3. We find in the last verse of our passage this morning the ultimate goal of Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians (13): **"so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."**
4. Ultimately, our goal should be the same as Paul
 - a. He encouraged the Thessalonians so that they would remain faithful in their relationship with Jesus and ultimately be blameless before God and Jesus Christ
 - b. We should encourage one another so that we might be as well

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| Conclusion |
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1. Encouragement is critical to the body of Christ, and it even goes a long way in witnessing to people
2. We learned today that encouragement is born out of a deep love for people and a desire to be involved in their lives
3. We also learned that encouragement is a two sided blessing—blessing both the one who gives it and the one who receives it
4. Finally, we learned that encouragement actually has a goal—holiness
5. Think about these things and ask yourself, how often do you think about encouraging others?
6. I think this is one of the areas I struggle—I have always been more of a "fixer" which means that it is easier for me to see what needs to be fixed and point it out <grin>
7. How about you? When others look at you, do they see someone who encourages them?