

Hindered but not Hopeless

1 Thessalonians 2: 17-20

What precious and powerful words are recorded for our exhortation in these few verses! These words reveal the very heart and soul of the apostle Paul. He, of all men, knew what it was to face adversity and extreme difficulty in ministry. Paul knew what it was to face abuse and rejection for the cause of Christ. [2 Cor.11:24-25 – Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. \[25\] Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep.](#)

As you consider the life of Paul, it might seem a bit depressing. We find a man who was wholly committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and yet he faced hardship on every hand. It is certain that Paul faced much difficulty, but he refused to allow the difficulties to dictate his existence. Paul had learned, and lived, a great truth – God is greater than any problem we face! The Scriptures teach us that: [if God be for us, who can be against. Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world. We are more than conquerors through Christ that loved us.](#)

Many times, throughout the Bible we find the people of God facing an uncertain future and apparent demise, and yet God proved Himself faithful and mighty in their situation. Things looked hopeless standing upon the Red Sea shore with the armies of Pharaoh pressing hard behind. Defeat seemed certain on the hillside of the valley of Elah. Fear and dread were prominent on the hill of Calvary, but hope rose with the dawn.

We likely have found ourselves in similar situations and yet God has never failed us. Things may look dark, but our God is still seated upon His mighty throne! I want us to take a few moments to consider the [certainties](#) revealed in the text concerning: [Hindered but not Hopeless](#). Paul had been hindered, but his hope was not gone.

I. A Place of Reality (17-18) – It is certain that Paul desired to be with the church at Thessalonica, but he was hindered in his desire. Rather than pouting and worrying over it, he made the best of the situation. Paul dealt with the reality of what he faced. Consider:

A. His Distance from Thessalonica (17a) – [But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.](#) He dealt with the reality that he had been [taken from them for a short time](#). He was no longer physically in Thessalonica, no longer present with them. He would've liked to have been, but he was forced to leave. This has the idea of *“being bereaved; torn away. It has the idea of the bereavement a parent would feel over a deceased child or the pain an orphaned child would experience.”*

- What a challenge that presents to us. We are under the assumption that everything must be perfect to serve the Lord. We are quick to get our feelings hurt and abandon the cause. Paul had been forced out of Thessalonica and yet he sought to encourage them in the faith.

B. His Devotion to Thessalonica (17a) – He may have been taken away in presence, but **not in heart**. The Lord may have allowed distance between them physically, but Paul’s love and devotion for them never wavered. He had established the church there and he longed to see it thrive to the glory of God.

- This may not seem that significant until we consider the circumstances of Paul’s removal. Acts 17:5-6, 8, 10 – But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ^[6] And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; ^[8] And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. ^[10] And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. Would you or I have cared anything about the church there after such an outrage? Paul continued to love them and sought to encourage them.

C. His Desire for Thessalonica (17b-18a) – **endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.** ^[18] **Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again.** Even after being threatened and forced to leave, Paul sought to return to Thessalonica. He literally longed to be there with them. The word **endeavoured** means “*eagerly seeking to return; a serious, concentrated effort.*” Paul endeavoured with **great desire**. That reveals “*a zeal, longing, strong passion.*” Do we possess that zeal, that longing, that passion for our church and the cause of Christ? Are we committed to serving the Lord above all else?

D. His Deterrence from Thessalonica (18b) – **but Satan hindered us.** Clearly Satan knew Paul and his ministry. Acts 19:15 – **And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?** The adversary was not happy with Paul’s accomplishments. He was angered that the Lord had empowered him and was using him mightily.

- He **hindered** Paul. This means “*to cut in a road; to make impassable.*” Satan did all he could to put up a “roadblock” in front of Paul. He was determined to hinder his work for the Lord. Acts 17:13 – **But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.** Even in the face of constant adversity, Paul loved the church there and sought their good.

- If we are seeking to serve the Lord and share the good news, we can count on adversity. You might as well go ahead and plan for some “roadblocks” in the way. The challenge for us is to seek a means around the hindrance and continue for the glory of God and the good of the church!

II. A Place of Rejoicing (19-20) – Trouble and difficulty were a constant reality, but all hope was not lost. Paul realized there was much in which to rejoice. Notice:

A. His Pondering (19a) – *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?* Paul realized there was much more to life and ministry than what he experienced in the physical realm. He knew that his ministry was not based upon happiness. He knew that there was much more than what was revealed on the surface. His joy was not deterred by the difficulties that he faced. He knew that God was doing something powerful and eternal in the lives of people! His hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing was in the ministry and salvation of souls rather than the temporal problems he faced.

- We would do well to learn that simple and yet profound truth. There is much more to life and serving the Lord than what we experience in our bodies. There is a heaven to gain, souls to reach, and a glorious Savior to serve! *1 Cor.15:19 – If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

B. His Pleasure (19b) – For many who observed the ministry of Paul in Thessalonica, it may have appeared to have been a complete failure. He was only there three months and ran out of town. He desired to return and yet he was hindered. In light of a modern phrase, Paul didn’t “sweat the small stuff.” His pleasure was much deeper than a few inconveniences. He was confident that many have received Christ. They were committed to serving the Lord even in the face of opposition. Paul had the assurance that he would stand with them at the coming of the Lord!

- Does that not put things in their proper perspective? Is that not what it is all about anyway? We are not here to please ourselves and establish recognition of our own. We are here to serve the Lord and reach the lost. There is nothing more precious than the assurance of standing before the Lord with those whom we introduced to the Redeemer! We have had our difficulties and they will continue without doubt. We must not focus on the temporal inconveniences, but rather on the eternal hope that all have in Christ!

C. His Peace (19-20) – *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?* ^[20] *For ye are our glory and joy.* Can’t you sense the

peace that Paul has in his heart as he pens this letter? It is not a letter that seeks sympathy for his adversity. He is not sad hearted or discouraged. Paul is at peace with God. He is rejoicing for the souls that have been saved. He is looking forward to the day that Christ calls for His church. He is joyful for the church and the work they are doing.

- Nothing will ever compare to the peace that our Lord gives. We face some difficult and uncertain days, but even in the midst of all that we can enjoy peace. Our hope is not based upon the dictates of this world. We have the assurance of a home in heaven through the sacrifice of our Savior. Life is hard to bear at times, but even then, there is peace that passes all understanding!

D. His Profit (20) – Satan had hindered the apostle and even sought to defeat him, but Paul was victorious. The world may have believed that Satan had gotten the upper hand, but Paul was laying up treasures in heaven. He had reached lost souls for the Lord. They had been born again in Christ and possessed an eternal hope. Paul may not have received much earthly compensation, but he would receive his reward!

- I know that the world doesn't understand the Christian. There are times when we've all asked ourselves if it was really worth it. We need to be reminded that this world is not all there is for the redeemed. You may never receive the recognition or compensation that you deserve down here, but I assure you that God is keeping a record. He will not forget one act of kindness done in His name. The child of God will receive their just reward.

Conclusion: We all face difficulties and hardships; that is simply part of living. As long as you live, trouble will abound. The enemy seeks to hinder and defeat us any way he can. There will always be opposition to the work of the Lord, but we don't have to resign to defeat. We may be hindered, but we are not hopeless! [Rom.8:35, 37-39 – Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ^{\[37\]} Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ^{\[38\]} For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ^{\[39\]} Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.](#) Do you feel hindered and discouraged? Seek the Lord and lean upon Him. Trust in Him even when you don't understand and He will strengthen you.