

II Thessalonians 3:1-2 The Importance of Hearing the Word

Well we start a new section and a new chapter this morning. II Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 1 through 5 is our section we are taking today. Our focus will be on the first commandment that Paul gave to the believers in Thessalonica after his presentation in the first two chapters. The first commandment in verses 1 through 5, we will be focusing on verses 1 and 2 this morning. In chapter 1 Paul gave them comfort concerning trials and hardships. From I Thessalonians, Paul's first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, we know that from the very first day that they received Christ that they were persecuted, and they suffered for it from that first day. And it was continuous, no break at all. They were persecuted right away. And in chapter 1 of II Thessalonians Paul presented that for them to be in trials and to be suffering for their faith is normal.

Second, then in chapter 2 of II Thessalonians he discussed and presented to us the correction concerning The Day of the Lord, or The Tribulation Period, which in the Bible is that seven-year period of judgment that comes after the taking up of the church. Judgment comes upon the earth, it is called The Day of the Lord or The Tribulation Period, as we know it. Biblically it is called The Day of the Lord. That comes for seven years and then the second coming of Christ, and we come back with Him on the earth when He sets up His kingdom.

So He presented the correction concerning The Day of the Lord or The Tribulation Period in chapter 2 of this letter. That there must be an apostasy, a falling away from the faith first, and that the man of sin must be revealed before God unleashes His judgment from heaven. And he says, **Those things have not happened yet, you are not in the tribulation period.** Remember, false teachers had come in and told them that the reason they are experiencing persecution and hardship because of their faith in Christ is because God is judging them. And Paul says, **God is not judging you.**

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians in chapter 4 verses 13 through 18 Paul presented that the church must leave before The Day of the Lord. That we are going to be caught up. The Latin word RAPTUS, *to be raptured and taken up by force* for a meeting of the Lord in the clouds, and that this will happen and then The Day of the Lord will come.

And then he went into I Thessalonians chapter 5 and presented that The Day of the Lord or The Tribulation Period is coming then, in time sequence to the rapture in chapter 4 verses 13 through 18. And in I Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 9 Paul says that God has not appointed us to wrath or judgment but for salvation. So we are going to be removed before the judgment comes. And so the second letter was to remind them of that, to comfort them concerning the tribulations and hardships, to correct the situation concerning the teaching about The Tribulation Period or Day of the Lord.

But now, as we begin chapter 3, the final chapter of the book as we have entitled this chapter The Instructions Concerning Their Testimony. Paul is now going to give them commandments as to how they are to conduct themselves while they are waiting for the coming

of the Lord. Now today, we are going to take the first commandment in this chapter and it is found in within the first few words of the chapter in verse 1.

He starts out chapter 3 by saying, **The rest, brothers.** The word *rest* in Greek literary means *the remaining things*. It is translated *summary* or *finally* as these are the closing remarks. Just the final, bring it together, and ready to sign off, and here are my last words to you from Paul.

The rest brothers, be praying concerning us. The word *pray* is the command for the first five verses. This is the first command that he is going to discuss in this chapter that they are going to be doing while they are waiting for the Lord to come. **Be praying concerning us.** The word *pray* is in the present tense which shows continuous action, **continually pray concerning us** and then he tells why.

There are two purposes that he presents to us in verses 1 and 2 about this final command on prayer. So prayer is the first command and there are two purposes that he shows for praying. It is represented by the word or words for one Greek word: *in order that*. In English translations it just says *that*, that is in order to save space. But in the Greek text it is a purpose clause. **Be praying in order that the Word of the Lord might run and might be glorified, according as also with you.** So the first purpose for prayer is that the word of the Lord might run. That is the literal translation. The word *run* in Greek is the word **τρέχω** (trechō). We get our English word *track* from it, the race *track*, the *track* that the runners run on. And so he is picturing here a track. And he says, **Pray that the word of the Lord is going to have free run on that track.** No obstacles. No hurdles. It is going to run unhindered.

Be praying for the running of the word of God. It wasn't to pray for him in the sense of to save his own skin, make sure everything goes well, that we are going to be happy and satisfied, and a nice life. He never prayed for himself in a fleshly or human sense. He always asked the believers to join together with him to pray for the effectiveness of the word of God. So he says, **Be praying, continually pray concerning us in order that the word of the Lord might run.** That is the word **τρέχω** (trechō). So it can have free reign without hindrance.

And secondly, just within this first purpose clause, **And the word of the Lord might be glorified.** Now, this is an interesting word that is continually used amongst religious people and Christians. I think it is important that we know exactly what it means. *To give glory to God*, what does that mean? Well, the word *glory* in Greek is **δόξα** (doxa) and it comes from the Hebrew word **kāvôdh**. Both words are translated *glory*. But **kāvôdh** in its basic root form means *weightiness*. Something that is heavy has value to it, it has *glory* in those days. The heavier the item the more expensive it costs. And so they would call it **kāvôdh**, *weightiness*. And so *glory* was attributed then to *substance*, the value of the substance was called **kāvôdh**. And I think that is interesting, if we understand it in the context of the language of the Scriptures, if we understand it is the substance, it is the value of the substance. For God to be glorified is for people to see His substance and the value of His substance.

Now, that is interesting because a lot of times it used in our day for credit. That is, I do something good in the human realm and I say, "Give glory to God." I am saying, "Give Him credit." That is not what *glory* means. *Glory* means *substance*.

So here, when it says, **And the word of the Lord might be glorified**, he is saying that the Lord himself in His substance might be seen in the word. That when people hear the word they would have Christ and His very substance ministered to them. The Lord is what Paul is saying that we should pray for. We should pray that the word of God should go out in an unhindered way. And secondly, when the word of the Lord is given that the Lord might be glorified in His word, that people will see the Lord, that people will come to know the Lord. So people will not come to somebody's revelation about what the Scripture says, but they will see Christ. The clear run and that the Lord might be glorified in His word is what Paul is saying they should pray for.

And then he says at the end of verse one, **According as also with you**. That is, he says, *according as the word of the Lord came to you unhindered*. So just like the word of the Lord came to you, and ran free course amongst you, and you saw Christ, and you were convicted to come to Christ, and He drew you to himself, this is the example he is giving them. Pray that what happened to you will happen with us, wherever we go to give the word.

There are two things about God's word that Paul was concerned about: (1) the word of the Lord going out from him and (2) then the word of the Lord coming in to the people listening. So the word of the Lord goes out from us, and the word of the Lord comes into us. Two things are happening when the word is given. It is being given by somebody and it is being received by somebody. Satan does not want the word of the Lord to go out. And secondly, he does not want anybody to hear the word of the Lord. And there is a reason for this, because of God's chosen way of ministering to His people.

In Romans chapter 10 verse 17 Paul says, **Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God**. We will see faith throughout this chapter. We know from the past because I have given it to you, but we will remind you again, that the word *faith* **πίστις** (*pistis*) means *persuasion*. So faith comes, the persuasion of the Lord comes to a person's life in the hearing of the word. Romans chapter 10 verse 17. So it is God's chosen way that when God's people gather together around His word, and the Lord reveals Himself through His word, and He ministers His word to people's hearts that faith moves in the hearts of God's people when they hear the word of God. Both going out and receiving.

In II Peter chapter 3 verse 18 Peter says, **We grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** when we gather together around His word. And God's Spirit takes the information about the Lord and ministers to people's hearts. As Paul says in Romans chapter 12 verse 2 it is for the renewing of the mind.

In Ephesians chapter 4 verse 23 it is for the renewing of the Spirit of the mind. And so, slowly there is a change and transformation that takes place at the hearing of God's word. Now God has appointed it to be that way. Satan is going to throw obstacles in our way so that we either will not or cannot go to hear the word of God. And he is going to throw obstacles in our

way so that we cannot represent the word, and give the word, and share the word. He does not want the word of God to go out. As you can tell, and as you and I and we all experience on Sunday mornings, Satan makes it very difficult. He puts obstacles in our way to going and hear the word. It is not a matter of going to church, it is a matter of worship and prayer and fellowship together, but it is the hearing of the word. As we will see in a moment, we are being exercised by God's Spirit ministering His word.

And here is something to take note of - now once we are saved, once we belong to Christ, Satan cannot have our soul. Once you surrendered your life to Christ, Satan cannot take your soul, you belong to Christ. The only thing he has left to do is to stop us from growing spiritually. Many people have come to me over the years and said that they believe that Christian growth is automatic, "I received the Lord ten years ago therefore I am a ten-year-old Christian, at least." So they say it does not make any difference what they do, I am going to grow in Christ whether I go hear the word or I do not. They say it does not make any difference if you hear the word or not, that a Christian grows automatically.

Well Hebrews chapter 5 verses 11 through 14 says just the opposite. It says that if you do not spend time and continually experience the ministry and the hearing of God's word that you can become dull of hearing. That is dull of hearing the Spirit and dull of understanding spiritual things. You can go back to being babes. You can know the Lord for ten years and still be a babe in Christ. There is not automatic growth. Growth comes by hearing the word of God, again according to Hebrews chapter 5.

Now Hebrews chapter 5 uses athletic terms to describe the believer's interaction with the word and the believer's growth. He says in Hebrews chapter 5 verses 13 and 14 - in verse 13 he says, **Everyone who partakes of the milk of the word** (that is, *the simplicities of it*) **is unskilled** (literally *inexperienced*) **in the word of righteousness for he is a babe**. Babies drink milk. Babies cannot handle solid food. **But solid food belongs to those who are mature, that is, those who by reason of having their senses exercised** - that is the word **γυμνάζω** (*gumnazō*), where we get our word *gymnasium* from - **having their senses exercised to discern both good and evil**. *Right and wrong*, is literally how it is literally translated. And so what he is saying in Hebrews chapter 5, when you go hear the Word your senses are being exercised, sharpened, so that over a period of time we are able to discern and be sensitive to what is right and what is wrong to the Lord. **But if you leave off from hearing the Word of God**, he says, **then you can become dull of hearing**.

It is like working out physically for athletics. If you go out and run out on the track - if I went out to run on the track at the school. If I were to try to run a mile my first time out, I would probably collapse. You would probably see me lying out there in the field some place where I collapsed. I am not in that kind of shape anymore. I would have to start out small, and then work my way up to where I can run long distances. But if I ever stopped working out, if I ever stopped running, I would lose that capacity, I would lose that ability.

You do not lose Christ spiritually, but we lose the sensitivity. He is right there with us - that is the frustrating thing. He is right there with us but there are times that we cannot sense Him there. We are not aware of Him. We are not aware of His promises for us because we are

so caught up in the human and in the flesh. And so growth, spiritual growth, there is no automatic growth, it comes by hearing the word of God.

Now in Revelation chapter 1 verse 3 it said, **Blessed are those who read and hear the words of the prophecy of this book.** It has a promise to those, a blessing upon those who read and hear the words of the prophecy of this book. And the Greek word for *to read* is not private reading, it is public reading; public reading of the word. A person is blessed at the public reading of the word and of hearing the word. It is public reading. It is people who get up and read the words of the book so that God's people can hear the word of God. It is to be read. It is to be studied. It is to be ministered to the people because it is God's chosen way that His Spirit takes the word and the unsaved are convicted of their need of Christ. And the saved grows through the hearing of God's word.

It is interesting the importance of God's word, especially in the early church, as recorded back in Acts chapter 6. In Acts chapter 6 you remember the early church, the Hellenists, that is the Greek speaking Jews were in a certain section of Jerusalem, and they came to the apostles, and they said, "Look, our widows are being overlooked in the distribution of bread." And so they said, "We will choose out from among you seven men who have a reputation of being full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom that we may appoint over these matters." And they were all Hellenists that were chosen. They were Greek speaking Jews. All their names were Greek, but they were Jewish people. So from out of the Hellenistic community they were to pick seven men there were going to represent the community and come and just distribute the bread in that particular community. And the apostles got up and they said, "This is necessary, because it is not right for us to leave prayer and the ministry of God's word to serve tables." So they are not saying, "This is beneath us to be servers of food to the Hellenistic community." They are not saying, "It is beneath us," they are saying, "It will take us away from that which is the most important thing for believers to be in, for prayer and the ministry of God's word."

And when they appointed these seven men, and these seven men took up the task of the distribution of the food to the Hellenistic women, Acts chapter 6 verse 7 says, **The word of God spread, and the disciples multiplied.** So when priorities were in place that is what happens, there is growth. People come to know Christ. People grow in Christ. The word back then in Acts chapter 6 spread because those who were giving the word were given free access to pray and to give the word and that was not hindered at all. Because once the word is not hindered God's word begins to spread and go out. That is what God uses. Now if the word is hindered then we can pray and see what God wants us to do. Because the hearing of God's word, and the ministry of God's word, and the proclamation and teaching of God's word, is exactly what He wants. That is God's top priority for all people, unsaved and saved.

So Paul says in summary, **Be praying. Be continually praying concerning us in order that the word of the Lord might run, that is, *unhindered*.** We are running with God's word. Just pray that the word of the Lord might not be hindered and we will have a free run on the track; that it might be glorified, that is, God's word according as also with you.

Then verse 2, verse 2 says, the second thing because it is the second phrase, **In order that.** *In order that* in verse 1 shows the first purpose for prayer. Verse 2 says, **In order that,**

showing the second purpose for God's prayer. **And in order that we might be delivered from the perverse and evil men; for the faith is not of all people.** That is literally how it reads. The faith is not of all people.

Remember we said just a few moments ago about the word *faith*, it means *persuasion*. The persuasion of God's Spirit is not with everybody. Not everybody is under the persuasion of God. Not everybody is under the persuasion of God's Spirit through His word. So it depends on what everybody is persuaded by. So it literally reads, **The faith is not of all people**, which means *all are not of the faith*. Not everybody has the faith. Notice he did not use the word *Christian*; he did not use the word *believe*; he used the word *faith*. So Paul says, "When we go out and minister the word of the Lord not everyone is of the faith." Not everybody is of the persuasion.

That was one thing they noticed in the book of Acts that the Christians were of the faith. That is, they were under the Lord's persuasion. They were under a different persuasion than everybody else and they noticed that. That is the ministry of God's Spirit.

Now the Greek word for *perverse* when it says, **That we might be delivered from the perverse and evil men.** The word *perverse*, it literally means *out of place*. These are people that are not in place and they are all evil men. There is one definite article in the Greek text, it is translated for you in our translation: **the perverse and evil men.** They are both perverse, out of place, and evil. These are people that are not in place, and they are evil men. And in the Greek text the definite article is there for both *perverse* and for *evil*. One article for both.

He is talking about people who twist the Scriptures. They take everything out of place, out of context, and they twist it. They are twisted people, and they are perverse people. They twist everything. The word for *evil* in our text, **the perverse and evil people**, the word *evil* is **πονηρός** (*ponēros*). Some English texts or translations have the word *wicked* but **πονηρός** (*ponēros*) is the word for the devil. He is the evil one. They are not interested in the Lord being glorified in His word, they have another agenda. It must be the Spirit of God that delivers us from these kinds of people.

In conclusions, and so it is interesting again, reviewing verses 1 and 2 that there are two purposes for prayer. Prayer concerning us, first of all, **In order that the word of the Lord might run unhindered and might be glorified**, that is, the substance of Christ seen through the word, **according as also with you.** And then secondly, **In order that we might be delivered from the perverse and evil men; for the faith is not of all people.** And so, it says we are going to encounter opposition. Satan is going to bring opposition against the word.

Notice what Paul is concerned about. When he says, **Pray in order that we might be delivered**, he is not thinking of it from a personal standpoint. It is an attack against God's word. Satan does not want God's word to go out and he does not want people to go and hear God's word. Paul says, "We come up against the opposition of those people who are energized by Satan, who are evil people." They are twisted. They twist things. You cannot even reason with them. You can't even reason with them, and they come up against us, and we need the spirit of God to deliver us. We do not have the spiritual ability to deliver ourselves. It must be the Lord.

So Paul was only concerned about the word of the Lord, he was not concerned about what happened to him. Only that God's word would have free reign and they would be delivered from those people who would bring opposition to His word.

So we see in Paul's writings and Paul's teachings, and we will see as we progress through this chapter that he is going to say that his teachings are the tradition for the church. Paul is emphasizing for us in all of his writings of how important the word of God is. It is God's chosen way to reach people for Christ - both the unsaved, the truth from God's word, as well as for the believers. Believers are experiencing spiritual growth by the continual hearing of the Word of God, which exercises their human senses to be able to discern both right and wrong in the eyes of the Lord. To leave off from that is to become dull of hearing, not able to hear the Spirit, not able to hear the word. It becomes like a need for milk all over again, which is what the writer of Hebrews said back in Hebrews chapter 5. You almost have to start over. There are many people today, many Christians that surrendered their life to Christ twenty, thirty, forty years ago who are still babes in Christ because they have never been exercised by God's Spirit through the word on a consistent, continual basis.

I can remember when I first received Christ over in Puerto Rico. When He first saved me, I began to study the word of God for myself. I remember I got a commentary and studied the Gospel of John. It was the first thing that I did. And as I would share with people, just in the natural way of talking about the Lord with people, other Christians asked me if I would start a Bible study. One guy said he had known the Lord for twenty years and he has never understood or heard the things that I was talking about, and I had only known the Lord for six months. But that is how people are. People are malnourished. They are insensitive to the Spirit and to spiritual things because they had not been exercised.

Well, we will continue with this and finish out this section Lord willing next week.

Let's close with prayer.