

Theme: Because spiritual warfare is real and Satan actively opposes the faith, God's people must anchor their joy not in circumstances but in His faithful work in the lives of those they love — a joy no enemy can destroy.

I. Intro – Our Oldest Child Moves Away

- A. Time went to Alabama for a year
- B. How would he do in his faith? Would it remain strong?
- C. “My fundamentalist; he corrects my heresy” – joy for us!
- D. Paul had similar joy in the Thessalonians

II. A Holy Desire

A. Paul desired to be with the Thessalonians

But since we were **torn away from you**, brothers, for a short time, **in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,** ¹⁸ **because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again**—but Satan hindered us. ¹ Thessalonians 2:17–18

- 1. Paul is returning to their time in Thessalonica
- 2. They did not just leave - they were ‘**torn away**’
- 3. See Acts 17:1-10 - riot; security bond for Jason; brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea
- 4. Paul had a strong desire to be with them in person - **in person not in heart; endeavored the more eagerly; with great desire; we wanted to come to you – I Paul, again and again** - all words to show Paul strong desire for them
- 5. Paul had not just shared the Gospel with them, but his very life! (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

B. Paul desired to be with them because they were his joy

For what is **our hope or joy or crown of boasting** before our Lord Jesus at his coming? **Is it not you?** ²⁰ **For you are our glory and joy.** 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20

- 1. They were Paul’s hope, joy and crown at Christ’s coming - strong words!
- 2. They were especially Paul’s joy - 3 times over!
For what is our hope or **joy** or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and **joy**.... ^{3:9} For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the **joy** that we feel for your sake before our God, 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20; 3:9
 - a. Paul only speaks of joy 4 times in 1 & 2 Thess.
 - b. Three of the times in this passage - a key theme!
 - c. Paul’s joy is not from his personal circumstances but rather from his fellow believers and the work God is doing in them
 - d. We see this elsewhere in Scripture as well
Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. Philippians 4:1
 - 1. Similar words to the Philippians – long for, joy, crown
 - 2. Paul’s joy was found in seeing others respond to the Gospel and walk with Christ!

C. Paul’s primary concern was for their growth in the faith

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2

1. He sent Timothy back - even though it left him alone
2. He did this to establish and exhort them in the faith
3. Paul's primary concern for them was that they grow in the faith - and he was willing to sacrifice for it
4. Our primary concern for other believers is that they are established and grow in the faith, and we should be willing to sacrifice for this goal.
5. This should be our goal as spouses, as parents with our kids, for our grandkids, and with our friends – not wealth, a great career, not “happiness” – but that they walk with Jesus Christ!

III. A Holy Concern

- A. He was concerned by possible effects of persecution that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. 1 Thessalonians 3:3–5
1. Concerned because they were being afflicted
 2. Persecution is a normal part of Christian life (vv3-4)
 3. Early Christians were taught & understood this strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.** Acts 14:22

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 1 Peter 4:12–14

4. Christians should not be surprised when we are mocked or persecuted for the faith - it is part of the normal Christian life.
5. This war has raged from when Cain killed Abel – and there will always be those set against the Gospel who will persecute God's people.

- B. Paul was concerned Satan would use persecution to stunt their growth in the faith
- For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. 1 Thessalonians 3:5
1. Persecution would come - but Satan would try to exploit it to destroy their faith
 2. Because Paul loved them and found joy in their growth, this was a major cause of concern for him
 3. While we realize suffering will come, it grieves us to see friends suffer and we worry for its effects on them
- C. Paul saw Satan's work hindering him
- But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because **we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.** 1 Th 2:17–18

1. Team wanted to return - Paul tried more than once
2. But Satan hindered them from coming
 - a. Perhaps about the bond (Acts 17:10)
 - b. Perhaps Paul's presence would provoke more riots
 - c. Perhaps a sickness for Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7)
 - d. Don't know for certain exactly what Paul meant - but it is clear that behind it all Paul perceived the work of Satan to prevent him from returning to be with the Thessalonians.
3. Christians should realize that Satan exists and he works to oppose us and the work of God
4. We must also realize that Satan could thwart even the apostle Paul from doing the work of God - so we will not always win in this spiritual war.
5. This can produce great concern – it did for Paul!
6. But the proper response is to turn to God in prayer and trust in the power of His Spirit and Word!

IV. A Holy Joy

A. Timothy's good report

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— 1 Thess. 3:6

1. Their faith and love had survived - and flourished!
2. They held to the faith and longed to see Paul again
3. A proper response to persecution and suffering causes faith and love to grow rather than diminish

4. We have seen this pattern repeated throughout Church history, from the book of Acts to the present day! Satan's unholy war cannot stop the growth of God's kingdom!

D. Paul's unspeakable joy at their growth in the faith

For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? 1 Thessalonians 3:7–10

1. He was comforted in his suffering by their faith (v7)
2. Now we live - great relief & joy at their faith (v8)
3. This led to renewed thanksgiving & prayer (vv9-10)
4. Once again, the proper response to our concern in the face of Satan's unholy war against God's people is to come to God in earnest prayer!

E. Seeing others established and persevering in faith should cause us to overflow with joy, thanksgiving, and praise

V. Applying the Word

A. Is my joy centered on God's kingdom or this age?

1. Paul's joy is centered on the kingdom, not this age
2. He has joy even under persecution, and even when those he loves are suffering persecution
3. This section is the highest concentration of 'joy' in Paul's writings

4. The highest concentration for a whole book is
Philippians - written from Roman prison!
5. For a Christian, joy is not centered in circumstances
but God's work in us and those we love.
6. Is my joy founded upon and centered in God, His
kingdom, and His work - or in this passing age?
7. Do changing circumstances destroy my joy - or
does it hold firm?
8. Are my life goals and thoughts centered around
growing in the faith - or things like money,
reputation, career, hobbies, or avoiding ridicule or
persecution?
9. What is my greatest desire and joy for my spouse?
My kids? My family? Am I more concerned about
their happiness or their holiness?
10. We were made to know, glorify and enjoy God
forever! Don't miss why you were made!
11. It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too
strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures,
fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when
infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who
wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because
he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a
holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. -
CS Lewis

A Holy Joy During Unholy War

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10

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Communion

St. Patrick's Breastplate

Teaching keywords: joy; persecution; perseverance; Satan and demons;
spiritual warfare; holiness

May Christ be your shield today:

Christ before you;

Christ behind you;

Christ beneath you;

Christ above you;

Christ on your right;

Christ on your left;

May Christ be with you,

Christ be in you alone and in multitude,

near and afar;

for all you face and for all your life,

that you may live in the protection, power, and blessing of the Holy Trinity.

F. The Table of Holy Joy

1. This Table is a refuge in the midst of the war!
2. Here our Shepherd cares for us and renews our joy!
3. Psalm 23 reading