

I Thessalonians 2:17-20

Paul's Forced Absence from Thessalonica

¹⁷But when we were separated from you, brothers and sisters, for a short time (in presence, not in affection) we became all the more fervent in our great desire to see you in person. ¹⁸For we wanted to come to you (I, Paul, in fact tried again and again) but Satan thwarted us. ¹⁹For who is our hope or joy or crown to boast of before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not of course you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy!

– *NET - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20*

¹⁷But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. ¹⁸Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.

– **NKJV - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20**

Bereaved

- The word used for being separated from the Thessalonians has the connotation of bereavement
- In the harsh sense of a father bereft of a deceased child
- “That illustrates how Paul felt about his premature separation from the Thessalonians” - John MacArthur



Just the Reverse

- But in this case, it was Paul that was forced to remove *himself* from the Thessalonians!
- The father being separated from his new-found child of God, who he had nurtured like a mother for her child, and also
- “Exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,” 1 Thessalonians 2:11
- So, I think the separation was more moderate; perhaps like having a child leave for college, or taking an unaccompanied assignment to South Korea.

¹⁷But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

– *NKJV - 1 Thessalonians 2:17*

- His forced and physical separation only increased his great desire to see them “face to face.” — The Moody Commentary

¹⁸Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

– *NKJV - 1 Thessalonians 2:18*

- Note the change in pronoun from we to an emphatic - even I, Paul,
- Let's talk about Satan hindering Paul, Silvanus and Timothy
- Earlier, they had spoken of having been hindered by the Jews from “speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.” 2:16a
- The hindrance from Satan is more substantial, though non-specific:

“**Satan** wants to thwart the progress of God’s kingdom much as an army seeks to disrupt the advance of an opposing army. The word translated as **hindered** is a military term referring to digging a trench or breaking up a road. One of the countermeasures an ancient army would take against the opposition was to dig a massive trench that would prevent enemy troops from reaching its men. Another way to frustrate the enemy’s progress would be to tear up a brick or stone road so that he could not traverse it. Thus Paul depicted the powerful devil as supernaturally obstructing the apostle’s strong desire to revisit Thessalonica. Paul did not state specifically how Satan thwarted his desire, but the hindrance could refer to the trouble at Jason’s house and the pledge that Jason made (Acts 17:9).”

–*The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary*

“⁹After the city officials had received bail from Jason and the others, they released them. ¹⁰The brothers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea at once, during the night.”

—Acts 17:9-10— NET

“We would also, whenever the course of the Gospel is retarded, know from whence the hindrance proceeds. He says elsewhere, (Romans 1:13) that God had not permitted him, but both are true: *for although Satan does his part, yet God retains supreme authority, so as to open up a way for us, as often as he sees good, against Satan's will, and in spite of his opposition.* Paul accordingly says truly that God does not permit, although the hindrance comes from Satan.”

Calvin, John. Calvin's Complete Commentaries

What Do You Think?

¹⁹For who is our hope or joy or crown to boast of before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not of course you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy!

– *NET - 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20*

- He speaks of the Thessalonians being his *crown*. In Greek, there are two words for *crown*. The one is *diadema*, which is used almost exclusively for the royal crown. The other is *stephanos*, which is used almost exclusively for the victor's crown in some contest and especially for the athlete's crown of victory in the games. It is *stephanos* that Paul uses here. The only prize in life that he really valued was to see his converts living good lives.
- Nothing that we do can bring us credit in the sight of God; but at the very end the stars in an individual's crown will be those he or she led nearer to Jesus Christ.

William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*

At His Coming

- Coming (*parousia*, "to be present") is a term used to refer to specific aspects of the Lord's return,
- Or the broader, multifaceted event associated with the beginning of the Day of the Lord.
- There is much discussion about what constitutes the Day of the Lord, but it appears to me to be a singular event at the end of the age.
- Regardless of the details, Paul's exultation, or boasting in the righteous sense, would be seeing all the believers to whom he had ministered, including the Thessalonians.

“Paul understood that when believers reach heaven, they do not receive literal crowns to place on their heads. Instead, the Lord will crown all believers with life, righteousness, glory, perfection, and joy. A great part of heaven’s bliss for the redeemed will be the joyful **presence** of those whom they have been used to reach. ... Whether or not believers know those people now as friends, they will know them in glory as friends forever and as sources of eternal **joy**.”

–John MacArthur, *Thessalonians*, p.74

“So Paul encouraged the Thessalonians with the truth that he did love them, evidenced by his desire to see them, the supernatural opposition it took to keep him away, and his view of heaven in which they would be central to his eternal **joy**. They also were his **glory**, which is the true honor bestowed upon him by God, who used him to reach them. The pronoun **you** is in the emphatic position so as to remove any doubt that Paul was identifying his Thessalonian brethren as the source of eternal honor and happiness.”

–John MacArthur, *Thessalonians*, p.74

Application Questions

- What would you say is comparable to Paul's forced separation from his Church in Thessalonica?
- Do you think the bail bond posted by Jason and others factored into Paul's desire to revisit Thessalonica?
- When I think of Satan hindering the spread of Christianity, a whole host of agents comes to mind, from Jews to Muslims to the "separation of church and state". What comes to your mind?
- Seeing the Day of the Lord as a singular event at the end of the age is supposedly an amillennial viewpoint, which I was not aware of previously. Was I brought up wrong?