

verse 17, all the way to chapter 3, verse 5. Chapter 3, rather, verse 10. Again, that's 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 17, reading through chapter 3, verse 10. The thing, for anyone who's gone through suffering, anyone who's gone through significant suffering, One of the things you probably have learned, at least I have learned from those who have gone through particularly grievous suffering, is that one of the greatest blessings that they can receive from you is your presence, right?

They don't need trite words. They don't need, you can't really solve their problem usually. They just need you to be there. There's a comfort with that. And that's because the worst thing you can be in suffering is alone, right? To feel as though you're isolated, to feel as though no one cares, and you are alone, utterly, in your pain. Because of that, all of us kind of know this instinctually, and so because of that, especially parents, when you hear that one of your children is suffering, that one of your children is in grievous pain, what's your first thought? If you get a call from your son, those of you who are parents who have children living a good distance from you, and you hear, Dad, Mom, I am suffering. Something terrible has happened.

What's the first thing you think? How can I get to them? How can I be with them? How can I be with them through this time? That's exactly the kind of position the Apostle Paul is in this passage. The Thessalonians are in the midst, are a young church, and they're beginning to endure persecution. And he hears about this. And he wants to be with them. He desires to be with them because he loves them. But because of circumstances, he is completely unable to do so. And that's hard. So what's Paul gonna do? What is the solution, or at least the temporary solution, that Paul is going to tell about in this passage? And what can that tell us about how we can better love one another?

So let's read this text, 1 Thessalonians 2. beginning at verse 17, but before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Father in heaven, as we open up your word, we pray you'd sanctify us in your word, for your word is truth. Open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise. Open our ears that we may receive your word. In Jesus' name, amen. 1 Thessalonians chapter two, beginning at verse 17.

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 because we wanted to come to you. I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus Christ is coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 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. 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. But now, 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. For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction, we have been comforted about you through your faith.

For now we live if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly, night and day, that we might see your face and supply what is lacking in your faith. This is the word of the Lord. May he add his blessing to it.

As we've been walking through the book of First Thessalonians, we've been talking about our four major headings. I've been trying to remind us of these because it's helpful for me and I hope it's helpful for you. This is kind of to always keep the big picture in mind. And we said our first heading was Thanksgiving, covering chapter one, as Paul gives thanks for the Thessalonians. Then there's exhortation, there's explanation. exhortation, and consolation. Right now, we're drawing close to the end of the explanation section that runs through chapters two and three.

Now, in this section, we've been viewing Paul and the Thessalonians as examples. Paul and his companions are examples of the Christ-like minister, the faithful minister, the one who administers the word well. And we've seen how the Thessalonians are examples of a church who receives the word well. And both of these are examples of that first virtue in the three cardinal Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. We've been seeing how the faithful minister administers the word and how the Thessalonians are to respond to that word with faith. In this passage, we're gonna continue to look at both Paul and his companions, as well as the Thessalonians, as examples.

But rather than examples of faith, we'll be looking particularly of their example as an example of love. Love. What kind of love ought to characterize a church, particularly between the church's leadership, the elders, the deacons even, and the congregation. That relationship is fraught in the church often with other things than love.

Thanks be to God, that has not been the case, at least in my experience here, but it can happen. And so we need to be reminded of what this relationship is supposed to look like, the kind of love that is to characterize it, and why this love needs to be here.

Now, as we walk through this text, you'll notice in our outline, we're outlining this text rather narratively, and that's because what Paul is essentially giving us is a little mini narrative. He's telling us about these past events. I didn't want us to lose sight of that as we walk through this text, but as we walk through these points, be on lookout as we continue to look at how this love is manifest, how this mutual love between Paul and his companions and the church in Thessalonica manifests itself and what that can tell us. So the first major heading as we look at this passage is Paul's problem. Paul's problem. Look with me at verse 17 of chapter two.

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. We have to remember that Paul, unlike many other places, Paul did not leave Thessalonica willingly. He left them much earlier than he desired to because of the outbreak of persecution. He was probably only there for a few months.

And that's why Paul describes it in this way here. Your translation reads, he was torn away. Some translations render it that he was orphaned from them. This is one of those familial metaphors that Paul has been using throughout the passage. He talked about how how he was like a nursing mother caring for the church sacrificially, how he was like the father instructing them. Now he says, and when we were torn away from you, we were ripped

away from you by this persecution, I felt like an orphan. I felt like someone who had suddenly had his closest family members torn away from him. And I felt alone. He was torn away from me.

And, but that persecution that tore Paul away from the Thessalonians didn't end there, did it? It followed Paul all the way to Berea. And it didn't just follow Paul all the way to Berea. That same persecution continued against the Thessalonians in Thessalonica.

We know this from chapter three, verse two, verse three rather, that no one be moved by these afflictions. No, the Thessalonians were being afflicted by persecutions. Now these persecutions were likely not lethal persecutions, or even necessarily imprisonment, but they were very real. They consisted probably of things like social ostracization, where the society said we're gonna have nothing to do with these Christian people. They reject our gods, they're a blight on the community, they are shunned.

And that also in turn manifested financially. It's hard to do business in a town, especially in the ancient world without the internet, hard to do business in a place where no one will talk to you, where you're isolated. The bills start coming in. Things get difficult. Times get lean. And there's suffering. And Paul's problem begins as he thinks about these persecutions that are afflicting the Thessalonians, and he begins to worry about them. He's anxious for them. What's he anxious about?

Look at chapter three, verse five. For this reason, we 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. See, Satan never loses an opportunity. And as this persecution, as Satan drives the Jews in Thessalonica, as well as the Gentiles, to persecute this new church, he is trying to tempt them. He's trying to pull them away from the gospel, trying to destroy this newly planted church. And Paul is anxious for them. He's anxious for them. Now, why is Paul so anxious for this little church at Thessalonica?

Well, first and foremost, obviously, just because he loves them. He loves them dearly. Look what he says in verse 17, or rather in verse 17. But since we were torn away from you brothers for a short time in person, not in heart. Paul, even though Paul was separated from the Thessalonians in person, even though he could not see their faces, they remained in his heart. He constantly was thinking about them, remembering them in his prayers. They were his personal concern.

And that wasn't just because Thessalonians... Paul didn't just have that concern for them because he liked them. Because he thought, these Thessalonians, we really hit it off. They're nice people. No, there's a much deeper reason for Paul's love. Paul had anxiety at their trials. But the real reason he's so concerned, the real reason for this problem is because his glory was in their progress. His glory was in their progress.

Look with me at verse 19. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus that is coming? Is it not you? I'm going to pause here for just a second. If you were to read just the first part of that sentence, what, for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at his coming? What answer would you expect? Well, I myself, I would expect the answer of Jesus Christ and his righteousness, right? That's what I would think.

And Paul does say as much elsewhere in a different context. who might say a lot of things. You might say, well, there might be all kinds of things that we could come up with for what Paul might say here. But he doesn't say that. He says, you, the Thessalonians, you are our joy and glory. He doesn't just leave it a rhetorical question. He answers his own question in verse 20. You are our glory and joy. Now, how can that be? What is Paul talking about? What does Paul mean by saying that the Thessalonians are his joy and glory, particularly at Christ's coming, at Christ's parousia, at Christ's second coming? What's Paul talking about? Well, the best way I can explain it is to go back to the teaching of Jesus, particularly to the parable of the talents. You remember the parable of the talents.

It starts with a king, a king who's about to go away to receive his kingdom. And while he's gone, he hands out some money, some talents, a talent was a weight of silver, to his servants. And he goes to the first servant and says, hey, here, I'm going to entrust you with 10 talents. Goes to the second, I'm going to entrust you with five talents. And he goes to the third, I'm going to entrust you with one talent. Now, while I'm gone, all of you invest that money, and I will take whatever you make when I return. So he goes away on this long journey. He comes back, and the first man says, look, sir, I took your 10 talents.

Now you have 20. He says, well done. Well done. You will be a ruler over 10 cities. And he goes to the second, sir, I invested your money. I got seven talents. And he said, good, good. I will make you a ruler over five cities. And then the last one comes. He says, sir, I knew you were a hard man.

I was afraid I'd lose your money. So I went and I hid my talent underground. But here's your money back, exactly as you gave it to me. And thank you very much. And the king responds, you wicked slave. You couldn't have at least put that money in the bank to get interest? You just hid it away on the ground? Take that talent away from him and give it to the man who had 10 talents. Now what's Jesus' point in this parable? Jesus' point is about vocation.

All of us have been entrusted with many things. All physical things, spiritual gifts, Talents, that's actually where the English word talent in our modern usage came from. These gifts from God, skills he's given us. All of us have been entrusted with all these different things.

And we are to use them for God and his glory. We're not to let them sit idle. So how does that apply to the Apostle Paul? Well, what has Paul been entrusted with? The churches. He's been entrusted, for one, with the church in Thessalonica, with those believers. And so when Jesus Christ comes again, when Paul is raised from the dead and stands before the Lord Jesus to render an account of what Jesus gave him, Jesus is going to ask him, and what did you do with the church at Thessalonica? How did you minister to the church at Thessalonica that I entrusted to you?

That's what Paul means. That's why the church is his glory and joy, because he wants to be able to tell Jesus, Jesus, I was faithful. And look at the results. I took those 50 members you gave me and look, they pursued their faith. They were mature. Now there's 60 of them. Now there's 70 of them. Now there's 80 of them. I made good with what you gave me. And that will be his glory and joy.

Now, friends, particularly elders of Second Presbyterian Church, this applies to you. This church, the members of this church have been entrusted to you as surely as the church in Thessalonica was entrusted to Paul. Thus, the church, Second Presbyterian Church, the members here are your glory, your joy, your hope at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll render an account. And often when we say that in a negative way, we think, oh, I'm afraid of what Jesus is gonna say.

But friends, it can also be a positive thing. It was a positive for the Apostle Paul. This is a great gift. Christ has given you a gift. Yes, this gift comes with responsibility, but it also comes with joy. You have the opportunity to be able to stand before the Lord Jesus and say, Jesus, I was faithful with what you entrusted me. And that will be your glory and joy. members of Second Presbyterian Church. Understand that you are the glory and joy of the elders of Second Presbyterian Church. So when it seems like they're meddling, there's that fun southern term. I've learned all kinds of southern terms since I've moved here. My friends up north laugh when I talk about hog-boggin. But you know what I mean by meddling.

Remember, if they ask you about your spiritual life, if they inquire, if they're concerned about your soul, it's not because they have some morbid curiosity. It's not because they're nosy. It's because they're gonna render an account. It's because you are their glory and joy. It's because they have a vested interest in your soul and they love you. They love you. I've seen it. I want to encourage the elders. I've seen that love you have for this church, and that's good. It's the heart of Christ. Accept that love. So we see here Paul's problem beginning here as Paul has this great love for this church, but there's a problem.

As they're enduring this persecution, as they're about to enter this time of trial, he finds himself unable to be there for them. Look at verse 18. Because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us. Satan hindered us. The word hindered here it refers to this idea of an army trying to escape another army, retreating, and they stop up the path behind them. They stop up the road to make sure the pursuing army can't get at them. And this is what Satan has done. He has stopped up the path to Thessalonica.

Now we don't know exactly what means Satan used to do this. It was probably through the governing authorities in some way. But for whatever reason, Paul could not make it to Thessalonica himself. And so what's Paul gonna do? Paul has this vested interest in Thessalonica. He loves them dearly. There is glory and joy. But they're about to enter this terrible time of persecution, this time of persecution early in their faith. How is he going to help them?

Well, we move now from Paul's problem to Paul's solution. Paul's solution. Look with me at chapter three, verse one. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother, and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith. First thing I want you to notice about Paul's solution here is the lengths he went. The lengths he went. And when Paul says here that we were left behind at Athens, he is likely making use of what's known as the literary plural.

He's not talking about him and Silas, because otherwise he wouldn't be left alone. He would have Silas with him in Athens. Very likely, Paul is simply referring to himself as we for literary effect. He likely sent Silas off to visit another church. And so Silas and Timothy, they're gone. And Paul is willing to be left alone in Athens in order to make sure that he can send Timothy and Silas out to visit these churches, particularly Timothy to visit the church in Thessalonica.

I don't know about you, but I guess There's a tendency in my own mind to view the Apostle Paul as this egghead, as though he's the kind of guy, you know the guy I'm talking about, the systematic theologian that you think is more at home in a library, you know, the kind of guy that would love it if he was just locked in a library alone for weeks on end, just because then he could just read and write without being interrupted. I don't know about you, I sometimes get that feeling about the Apostle Paul. Maybe it's because so many systematics haven't written off his work. But that's not a biblical view, is it? That's not the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul loved his congregations. He loved ministry. He loved going out and preaching. He loved being with people.

And thus, for the Apostle Paul to be left alone, isolated from his companions, isolated from any kind of Christian fellowship in Athens, that was difficult. And if it wasn't difficult for him, why would he take the time here to say, I was willing to be left alone? That was hard for him. And it was especially hard considering Athens is one of the only cities, one of the only Greek cities in the area that did not have a significant Jewish community. All he had were pagans. No chance for real fellowship.

But he was willing to endure that. Why? Because he, again, he had that vested interest in the Thessalonians. He loved them. He was willing to take upon himself some discomfort. And so he sends Timothy. He has Timothy leave him behind. He sends Timothy to Thessalonica. What kind of mission did he send Timothy on? What was the nature of this mission to Thessalonica? Well, he sent Timothy to Thessalonica with a ministry of reminder. A ministry of reminder.

Look at verse three. that no one may be moved by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we were destined for this. 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.

See, the idea that the Thessalonians were going to endure persecution was not news to them, and Paul had not neglected to give them instruction on suffering as a Christian. So when Timothy goes to exhort them in the words of verse three, verse two rather, he's not telling them a lot of things that are new. He's not exhorting them on a new doctrine. He's reminding them of what Paul already told them. I wanna pause here just for a moment and ask, is this a part of our basic gospel instruction?

Because it seemed to be a part of the Apostle Paul's. I mean, Paul wasn't at Thessalonica very long. He was beginning here with pagans, people who didn't even know about the true nature of the triune God, the true nature of God himself, let alone about Jesus Christ, let alone about justification, let alone about predestination. But among all the doctrines that Paul hammered in those first three months, or maybe even two months that he was in Thessalonica, He taught them that Christians are those who will suffer. When you explain the gospel to someone, is that something you bring up?

Because it's biblical, and at least for Paul, it's foundational. Jesus said, anyone who would come after me must take up his cross daily and follow me. is a real part of the Christian life, and we ought to make it a part of our basic instruction. And praise, thanks be to God, it is something that we regularly talk about here at Second Presbyterian Church, and it's wonderful, I wanna encourage us in that, but it's something to think about. So Timothy is sent on

this ministry of reminder, to remind the Thessalonians of what Paul already told them, that Christians are those who are going to suffer. He also sent him on a ministry of encouragement. Encouragement. I don't know, like we said at the beginning before we even read the passage, one of the greatest gifts you can give someone in a time of suffering is your presence.

Therefore, even though the Apostle Paul couldn't be with the Thessalonians himself, he was still able to send Timothy. And Timothy wasn't a stranger to them. Timothy had been among them when Paul was there. They knew him. They loved him. You think they weren't encouraged by seeing him? By seeing Timothy, seeing his face, Timothy coming to him and saying, Paul, he sent me to you. He's been thinking about you. He wants to know how you're doing. He wanted me to encourage you. He wanted me to tell you what's been going on.

That would have been done wonders for their feeling of isolation as they're ostracized by their community, and they've probably felt very alone. And they were encouraged. It's one of the ways we can encourage each other. If you hear about someone who's suffering, you hear about someone who's going through a difficult time, you don't have to have something to say. You can just be there. That's encouraging.

So Timothy was sent on this ministry of reminder, this ministry of encouragement. He was also sent not just for the Thessalonians' sake, but for Paul's sake, he was sent on a ministry to learn. ministry of learning. He wanted to find out from the Thessalonians how they were doing. Look at verse five. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter attempted you and our labor would be in vain. Paul had to know what's going on at Thessalonica. Heavily endured. Was the seed truly planted on good soil, or would it prove to be nothing but stony ground?

Well, we move now from Paul's solution to this problem to the results. What are the results of this solution that the Apostle Paul employs? We see that in verse six. 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, the first result is a good report, is a report of the report of their condition.

This is a good report. Paul is glad to hear it. In fact, the word he uses to talk about Timothy telling the news, telling him the good news, is the same word that's used for telling someone the gospel. It is gospelling them. Paul draws an analogy here between hearing the good news about what's going on in Thessalonica and hearing the gospel of salvation. That's how good this report was. And what characterized this report? What about this report made it so good?

Well, let's hit the highlights, because Paul hits the highlights. It's the good news of your faith and love. Faith and love are two of those three cardinal Christian virtues. They're the fruit of the Spirit. And Paul hears this report and hears, yes, they're loving one another. They're exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. They haven't given up on their confession. They are truly still in Christ. They are exhibiting this fruit. They're being sanctified. What else was in this report?

Well, remembrance and reported that you always remember us kindly. You always remember us kindly. Paul had not forgotten the Thessalonians and the Thessalonians had not forgotten him. They were constantly remembering

him. I can picture them gathering together on Sunday and saying, now remember, we got to pray for the apostle Paul. We don't know where he is now. We heard he had plans to go to Athens. He's probably there by now. Let's pray for him. What do you suppose Paul is now? I don't know. They remembered him. Third, they were fond of him. They were fond of him. You remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you. Paul wanted nothing more than to see the Thessalonians, and they longed to see him.

I don't know about you, maybe this is just me, but when you first start dating someone, there's always this anxiety at the back of your head, like, does she actually like me? Does she actually, like, enjoy being around me, or is she just looking for the free coffee? Like, what's going on here?

And however ridiculous it might seem, especially by like a third or fourth date, and you're like, okay, I mean, she probably likes me if she's going on the fourth date, but I don't know. And then comes the moment when she actually tells you, yeah, I like you. And you just feel this immense relief, and you're like, oh, good. Okay, it's mutual. She actually likes me. Hallelujah.

That's akin, I think, to what the Apostle Paul felt hearing this report from Timothy. As much as he was fond of Thessalonians, as much as he valued them, as much as he loved them, they loved him. And this report, this good report he received from them was a massive relief to him. He had relief at their perseverance.

Look at verse seven. For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction, we have been comforted about you and through your faith. For now we live if you are standing fast in the Lord. Paul was relieved by, and Paul now turns to his own sufferings, his own afflictions. He said he was relieved in the midst of his afflictions.

Now, what these afflictions were, again, we're not sure. It was likely not imprisonment or anything like that because he's in Corinth by this point. Those kinds of persecutions wouldn't come until later. Most likely he's speaking of the same kind of persecutions the Thessalonians were enduring. Ostracization, opposition from the Jewish leaders, financial difficulty.

And through all of these anxieties, all of these hard things, Paul experiences massive relief from this report from the Thessalonians. It is like water to his soul, water to thirsty ground. Why is that? Why was Paul so relieved at hearing that Thessalonians were enduring, that Thessalonians were making progress, that Thessalonians love you and remember you? Well, Paul doesn't exactly say, but I think we can rightly infer based on what he has said, and based on ministry experience, that it's because he was afraid his labor was in vain. He says as much in verse five.

Friends, nothing is more discouraging in ministry than feeling like your labor is in vain. And feeling like you're working hard, feeling like you're pouring yourself out for this ministry, pouring yourself out for this church, pouring yourself out for that person in trouble, person in pain. And it's seeming as though it's worthless, didn't matter, didn't make a difference. That's hard.

And so when Paul heard from the Thessalonians, it wasn't in vain. They're enduring. They're growing. They love you, Paul. They remember you. He was encouraged. Members of Second Presbyterian Church, you want to encourage your leadership. You want to love your leadership.

Help them to know that their labor is not in vain. Help them to know Their work is not in vain. It'll be like water on thirsty ground. I'm not asking you to flatter them or butter them up. That's wrong. But think about encouraging them. I know many of you do, and that's wonderful. I want to encourage you. I don't see a specific lack of that, but I want to give you this reminder. If you're looking for a way that you can love the leadership at Second Presbyterian Church, that is a great way.

So Paul experiences this relief after hearing this report, even to the point where he says, now we live if you are standing fast in the faith. He felt as though he was dead before. Now he feels truly alive because of this report. And this good report, this relief that he feels, yields action, particularly the action of prayer.

It manifests itself in prayer. Look at verse nine. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you for all the joy that we feel for your sake before God? Paul follows his own advice that he will give later on in Colossians. He begins his prayer with thanksgiving. He says, thank you, Lord, for this good report. And I may ask in the back of your head, why is he thanking God for this good report?

Well, because this good report ultimately wasn't the work of the Thessalonians. It wasn't the work of Paul. Paul will say in 1 Corinthians that he planted Apollos watered in Corinth, but it was God who caused the growth. It was God who caused the growth in the Thessalonians.

It was God who yielded this love in them, who yielded this progress in them, who yielded this perseverance in them. And for that love, for that, he thanks God. Again, that doesn't take away our responsibility. God's sovereignty is never an excuse for our laziness, but helps us in our weakness. Or in the words of the Apostle Paul, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, For it is God who has at work within you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So Paul thanks God for their progress, thanks God for the good report, thanks God for their love and the encouragement he's received, but he doesn't stop there.

Look what else he prays in verse 11, verse 10 rather. As we pray most earnestly, night and day, that we might see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith. Paul isn't satisfied. He's heard the report. The report's good. It was a cup of cold water. But he wants more. He has to see them. He still needs to see them face to face. He needs to see them face to face. Why? Because he still needs to supply what is lacking in their faith. We ask, well, but he received a good report. They were making progress. They're doing well.

Why is he talking about a lack in their faith? Well, there's always a lack in our faith. There's always a lack. There's always something to be done, always something to be built up. And Paul will get to that when we move here from explanation to exhortation. There's going to be more.

To love your congregation in part means to never really be satisfied with their sanctification. Never be satisfied with their progress. Be encouraged by their progress, love their progress, never be satisfied with it. Not until your congregation is composed of just Jesus. That's when you can be satisfied. When your congregation has been conformed completely to the image of Christ. It won't happen in this life, I'll tell you that. Continue to love them. by continuing to shepherd them. So we've seen this story of love between the apostle Paul and his congregation. Paul's problem, he loves them dearly, he has a vested interest in their progress, but he can't get to them.

And so what does he do? He sends his co-ministry leader, Timothy, to encourage them on this mission of encouragement, to hear how they're doing, He's willing to be left behind alone in Athens to do it. And when he gets to Corinth, Timothy comes back to him and gives him this good report about their progress. And this is like a cup of cold water to him. It's a relief in all his persecutions. How does he respond?

Thanksgiving to God and further prayer for their progress. This is what love looks like in the church of God. Let's pray. Father in heaven, your word challenges us, and it also encourages us. You break us down only to build us up. You wound us only to cure us. Lord, thank you for the good godly leadership here, for the love that they have shown to this congregation. We pray that would increase And Lord, we pray for all of us in this congregation, that you might grow to love them more, and that by that love, the world might look in and see that we are truly your disciples. In Jesus' name, amen.