

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Rewards of the Ministry"

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Introduction

1. Paul was the founder of the church at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4). He endured terrible suffering to get the work started (Acts 17:5ff.).

2. The work at Thessalonica thrived (1:6-10). Paul's ministry among them in the early days was exemplary (2:1-13). The church went through suffering like the brethren did in Judea (vv. 14-16).

3. But there are rewards for the Gospel ministry. They are not all what one might want or expect, but nonetheless, they are the results of the Gospel. Here are some of them:

1. EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT vv. 17, 18.

a. Its character

Paul very warmly refers to the believers at Thessalonica as "brethren." This is a filial term and is reserved for those in the family of God. His use of "we" suggests that there were others who shared this same warm fellowship with them. The aorist passive verb meaning to be "orphaned" is employed here for "being taken from you." It is only used here in the New Testament and expresses Paul's deep emotions on being separated from the church. Previously he had referred to his relationship with them as a nursing mother (v. 7), a babe (v. 7), a father (v. 11), and now here as an orphan! Thank God, it was only for a "short time" (literally: a season or an hour) which probably meant a few months.

b. Its concern

Paul's inner affections referred to by the term "heart" showed that though they were out of sight, they were not out of mind. In fact, he notes he used every effort to see them. He employs an ingressive aorist verb plus an adverb which are best rendered "became zealous more abundantly than before" to demonstrate his tremendous concern about seeing them. He wanted to see their "face." The final phrase "great desire" actually means Paul "ran after" them (cf. Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23).

c. Its commitment

Paul was so involved with the believers that he uses emphatic means to express his intentions (v. 18). He employs the strong verb "will" (for "would") to show his mental decision to come to them.

2. DIABOLICAL OPPOSITION v. 18.

a. Identified. The name "Satan" is a reference to a real being (1 Pet. 5:8). The name means "adversary" and is used at least 36 times in the New Testament.

b. Indicated. His work against Paul is noted as "hindering." The verb means to "cut in" and make something impossible. It is apparent that the Lord allows this to happen (Job).

c. Interfered. The apparent advantages of Satan were not successful. In the end the Lord was victorious: 1) the Thessalonians remained true; 2) Timothy revisited them (1 Thess. 3:6); 3) Paul ultimately returned (Acts 20:1); 4) the letters got through to the church.

3. ETERNAL EXULTATION vv. 19, 20.

a. What? Three words are given to demonstrate that the future holds much for those who have been involved in the Gospel: 1) hope, 2) joy, 3) crown of rejoicing. These are items which do not come in dollars and cents.

b. Whom? The items just mentioned are personified in the believers at Thessalonica. Using emphatic pronouns, Paul enforces the concept that the Thessalonians are Paul's joy, hope, and crown. This has led many to believe that the reward for soul winning is the believer himself. Other rewards are given under the symbol of a crown: 1) The incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25) is applicable to all the crowns and relates also to faithful, temperate living. 2) The Crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8) describes God's character but also relates to those who behave themselves in the light of His coming. 3) The Crown of life (James 1:12) notes the permanence of the reward and relates also to patient endurance even unto death. 4) The Crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4) concerns those ministers who feed the flock without ostentatiousness or greed.

c. When? It is all summed up in the words "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming." This does not specifically state the "rapture," but it is clear that this is meant (1 Cor. 3; 2 Cor. 5).

Conclusion These are rewards for serving the Lord. Many may not agree on the sort of rewards listed here. However, God is working out His purpose in all the events of the lives of His own. The higher design will some day be revealed.