Persevering Till Jesus Comes
Message 3 in “Getting Ready To Meet Jesus” Sermon Series
(A Study of I & II Thessalonians)
I Thessalonians 2:13-20 (NKJV)

Are you ready to meet Jesus?
Are you where you ought to be?
Will He know you when He sees you
Or will He say, “Depart from Me”?
Are you ready to meet Jesus? Are you ready?

- Bob Dylan
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That’s the soul-searching question we are considering in this series of messages from First and Second Thessalonians.

Please open your Bibles to I Thessalonians chapter two and let’s read tonight’s scripture text in verses 13-20.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 (NKJV)

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

17 But 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. 18 Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. 19 For 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? 20 For you are our glory and joy.
INTRODUCTION

Let’s think about the word PERSEVERE for just a moment.

The dictionary defines persevere this way: “To persist steadily in one’s actions or beliefs, usually over a long period of time.”

When we think of people who persevere, we think of marathon runners who fight through grueling fatigue and pain until they cross the finish line.

When we think of people who persevere, we think of weary soldiers who keep fighting in battle though exhausted and hungry.

People who persevere DON’T QUIT!
People who persevere DON’T GIVE UP!
People who persevere PRESS ON despite the ODDS.....the OBSTACLES.......or the OPPOSITION !

A spirit of perseverance is absolutely essential if we are to live a victorious Christian life.

In the Christian life, many start the race but they don’t finish.......they don’t persevere.

(PAUSE)

In tonight’s scripture text we see three keys to PERSEVERING TILL JESUS COMES.
First of all………..

I. We Must Persevere In Times of SUFFERING (vs. 13-16)

Let’s look once again at VERSES 13-16.

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,

15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,

16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

1. You notice there in verse 14, Paul said, “”For you, brethren, became imitators of the Churches of God which are in Judea.””

That word “imitators” means to “mimic” or to “mime.”

The Church at Thessalonica had such a deep admiration for the LOVE and UNITY and GENEROSITY that had been demonstrated by the early Church in Jerusalem, they wanted to pattern their lifestyle after theirs……they wanted to “mimic” or “copy” them.

2. The Thessalonians “imitation” of the Church in Judea proved to be a double-edged sword. While copying the Church in Judea in their lifestyle, they also suffered persecution like the Church in Judea.
3. And the “common thread” that links the suffering of the Church in Judea and the Church at Thessalonica is that both were persecuted by their own countrymen.

4. Having just studied this in our Wednesday night Bible study from the Book of Acts, we are quite familiar with the suffering endured by the early Church in Jerusalem.

   “THE APOSTLES suffered imprisonment and beatings and threats upon their lives for preaching the gospel. And this suffering came at the hands of their own Jewish countrymen.

   “STEPHENV, one of the deacons in the Church in Jerusalem suffered martyrdom at the hands of his own Jewish countrymen.

   “Then in ACTS 8 we see the whole Church in Jerusalem suffered such terrible persecution they fled Jerusalem and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. And this persecution came at the hands of their own countrymen.

3. In verse 15, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that this suffering started before the Church was ever established.

   He reminded them how the Jews had killed the LORD JESUS. Notice Paul calls Jesus “LORD.” The Jews thought they were killing a man.....a lowly carpenter from Nazareth, but in reality they were killing the “LORD GOD”.....”THE ONE WHO CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH.” They killed the very one who came to save them!

   This is the ONLY instance in all of Paul’s writings, where he specifically implicates the JEWS in the murder of Christ.
4. Also in VERSE 15 Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the “suffering” went even farther back than the crucifixion of Jesus. He said, “they also killed their own prophets.”

Throughout the Old Testament God raised up many prophets to foretell the coming of the Messiah. But rather than listen to those prophets, the Jews persecuted them and even killed some of them.

History tells us that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Amos, and Zechariah all suffered martyrs deaths.

5. And now, just like the Old Testament prophets……just like Jesus……just like the Church in Judea…….THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA IS SUFFERING PERSECUTION AND IT COMING FROM THEIR OWN COUNTRYMEN.

6. So long as the Lord’s Church remains on earth, Christians will suffer criticism….mockery….ridicule…..rejection…… discrimination……torture and even death.

7. I don’t believe anyone of us wants to go out and pursue “suffering” or invite persecution upon ourselves, but if we stand up for our faith in Christ, sooner or later we will suffer for the cause of Christ.

Paul writes in II Timothy 3:12 (NKJV) Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

8. What do we do when this kind of suffering comes upon us? We do what our brothers and sisters-in-Christ in every generation before us has done. BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, WE PERSEVERE……..WE PRESS ON TILL DEATH OR TILL THE LORD COMES TO GET US, WHICHEVER COMES FIRST!
Secondly........

II. We Must Persevere In Times of SPIRITUAL BATTLE (vs. 17-18)

17 But 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.

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

1. How did Satan “hinder” Paul from going back to Thessalonica? Paul doesn’t give us any details.

   But we know from what Paul tells us in Ephesians 6, that Satan has an invisible army that is constantly battling against the saints of God. And quite often Satan works through the hearts of unbelievers.

2. Paul had experienced these kinds of “spiritual battles” many times throughout his ministry.

   - At ANTIOCH PISIDIA, Acts 13:45, 50 tells us, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things Paul spoke. VERSE 50 goes on to say, “But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

   - At ICONIUM, Acts 14:1,2 tells us, “Now it happened in Iconium that they (Paul/Barnabas) went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great number of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

   - At LYSTRA, Acts 14:19 says, “Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.”
3. Everywhere Paul preached he encountered these kinds of "spiritual battles" where Satan worked through the hearts of unbelievers to try to stop Paul’s preaching.

But rather than dissuading or discouraging Paul, Paul persevered! He pressed on! He never quit!

4. John Wesley could probably identify with the apostle Paul. Listen to these words Wesley recorded in his diary.

Sunday, A.M., May 5  Preached in St. Anne’s. Was asked not to come back anymore.

Sunday, P.M., May 5  Preached in St. John's. Deacons said "Get out and stay out."

Sunday, A.M., May 12 Preached in St. Jude’s. Can’t go back there, either.

Sunday, A.M., May 19 Preached in St. Somebody Else's. Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return.

Sunday, P.M., May 19 Preached on street. Kicked off street.

Sunday, A.M., May 26 Preached in meadow. Chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service.

Sunday, A.M., June 2 Preached out at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway.

Sunday, P.M., June 2 Afternoon, preached in a pasture. Ten thousand people came out to hear me.

Through one “spiritual battle” after another, John Wesley persevered!
5. The day you and I accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we entered into a life filled with God’s richest blessings! But it was also on that same day we began a great struggle with Satan and his evil forces.

6. It should never come as a surprise to us when we are engaged in “spiritual battles” with the devil. In fact, it should concern us if we are not!

7. From the day we accepted Christ until the day we die or Christ comes again, Satan is going to attack us over and over again! He will tempt us in our weakest areas. He will try to discourage us! He will try to depress us and defeat us! He will try to destroy our Christian witness and steal our spiritual joy. He will try to convince us that God doesn’t love us and He doesn’t forgive our sins!

8. And Satan’s goal in launching these spiritual attacks against us is to “wear us down” so we give up and quit! But by faith we must persevere!

III. We Must Persevere To Receive Our SURE REWARD (vs. 19,20)

19 For 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?

20 For you are our glory and joy.

1. It is very obvious from these letters that Paul had a very deep, abiding love for the Thessalonian Christians. And he expressed how much he wanted to see them again.
2. But Paul took great comfort in knowing that if he never saw the Thessalonian Christians again in this world that he would see them at the return of Jesus Christ!

That was Paul’s hope.....his joy....his crown of rejoicing! That was THE SURE REWARD that caused Paul to persevere!

3. Warren Wiersbe writes:

When the Christians at Thessalonica read this letter, it must have encouraged them tremendously. They were going through intense persecution and suffering, and perhaps some of them were tempted to give up. “Don’t give up!” Paul encouraged them. “Lay hold of the spiritual resources you have in Jesus Christ. You have the Word of God within you, the people of God around you, and the glory of God before you. There is no need to give up.” (Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor or Logos)

CONCLUSION

Clint Courtney played catcher for the Baltimore Orioles back in the 1950’s. He never came close to making it into the baseball Hall of Fame. In fact, it is very doubtful that Clint Courtney ever got his picture on a bubble gum baseball card.

During his baseball career, Clint Courtney earned the nickname “Scrap Iron.” “Old Scrap” as his coaches called him, never broke any records, just bones. He had very little power at the plate or speed on the base paths.

As for grace and style, he made the easiest play look rather difficult. But armed with mitt and mask, Scrap Iron never flinched from any challenge.

Batters often missed the ball and caught his shin. Their foul tips nipped his elbow. Runners fiercely plowed into him, spikes first, as he defended home plate. Though often doubled over in agony, and flattened in a heap of dust, Clint Courtney never quit. Invariably, he’d slowly get up, shake off the dust, punch the pocket of his mitt once, twice, and nod to his pitcher to throw another one.
The game would go on and Courtney with it -- scarred, bruised, clutching his arm in pain, but determined to continue. He resembled a POW with tape, splints, braces, and other kinds of paraphernalia that wounded people wear. Many people made fun of Clint Courtney, but to others, he was an inspiration to persevere no matter what!

Like Clint Courtney, you and I are going to endure lots of spiritual cuts and bruises. There will be many times when we have to “play hurt” in the Christian life!

But no matter how banged up or bruised we may be, may we have a spiritual resolve as tough as rawhide!

LET US PERSEVERE TILL JESUS COMES!