*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 10 - 15

Letters of Paul

**Monday, January 10 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20**

“We wanted very much to come to you”

 Paul communicates here not only his (so far unsuccessful) attempts to return to Thessalonica, but also his deep feelings for them. These attempts failed, he reports, not because of any lack of desire or effort on Paul’s part but because “Satan stopped us.” Defeated in the cross and doomed to be completely vanquished in the end, Satan nonetheless in the meantime continues to attack God’s people; against such attacks believers are exhorted to put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17 – see tomorrow’s devotion). How Paul was blocked is not stated. Timothy no doubt informed the Thessalonians about the circumstances that made it impossible for Paul to visit them, but we must acknowledge that Paul’s letter leaves us without a clue.

 Paul explains why he was longing so strongly to see them again. To him they represented both the fruit and the evidence of his God-given ministry. Even as parents rejoice and take pride in the accomplishments of their children, so it is with Paul and his Thessalonian converts/friends. Their continuing faithfulness is for Paul a source of deep personal joy.

*What joy it is, Lord, to see others faithfully following you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 11 Ephesians 6:10-17**

“Stand firm against all strategies of the devil”

 In yesterday’s text from Thessalonians, Paul spoke of Satan’s interference in his ministry. In these verses, Paul encourages us to be strong in the Lord. This presumes that God is eager and willing to provide strength and that any lack of strength results from our neglect. To be strong in the Lord also assumes that we need strength. For all its joys, life is hard and full of difficulties, challenges, and traps. Some of these come from illness and death, some from what other people do, and some from our own egos. Whatever the circumstance, however, life in Christ requires our entire being. The strength to stand firm is supplied by God’s own Spirit.

 According to the New Testament, Satan is more an annoyance that a great overpowering force. The threat of danger exists, but this enemy is defeated, is not in control, and is limited in power. Does God fear evil or the devil? The thought is ludicrous. But the armor God uses to defeat evil is given to us, so in the power of the Spirit who lives in us we must put it to its intended good use and stand firm against all the strategies of the devil.

*By putting on your armor, Lord, we resist the work of evil and of the devil. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 12 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5**

“We sent Timothy”

 Paul was more than a little anxious about the Thessalonians, and for good reason. He had been forced to leave those relatively new converts alone and without outside assistance when he and his companions were driven out of town. The trials experienced by the Thessalonians because of their conversion to Christianity might well have convinced them that they had made a major mistake in abandoning their conventional religions in order to embrace Christianity. Indeed, so concerned was Paul that he, though unable to return himself, was unwilling that the Thessalonians should be left without support, and so a decision was made that Timothy should return as his authorized representative.

 Timothy’s task was to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonian believers, helping them both to understand and to live out what it means to be members of God’s people in the face of troubles which can so easily shake one’s faith. While hoping for the best, Paul feared the worst and was eager to hear back from Timothy how things stood with the Thessalonians.

*I pray that my faith will not be shaken, Lord, by the troubles of this world. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 10 - 15

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, January 13 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8**

“Timothy returned with good news”

 What a relief it was for Paul when Timothy returned with the news that the Thessalonians had indeed successfully resisted Satan’s temptations. Whereas Timothy had been sent to inquire about their faith, he reported back about their faith and love. This suggests that he not only found them persevering in their confidence in God, but also maintaining a proper standard of Christian conduct (i.e., love) toward those around them – no doubt something hard to do while being opposed. To Paul, this was evidence of the work of the Spirit and of the reality of faith.

 Moreover, Timothy also reported the Thessalonians had positive memories of Paul and his fellow missionaries and would welcome a return visit. The immediate consequence of this good news from Thessalonica was that in the midst of their own distress and persecution, Paul and his companions were encouraged by the Thessalonians. In short, those who Paul sought to encourage had themselves become encouragers of Paul.

*How encouraging it is, Lord, when Christians stand firm in their faith. Amen.*

**Friday, January 14 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

“Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians”

 Paul models for us a prayer centered around thanksgiving for and intercession on behalf of others. *Paul prays with thanksgiving –* Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians, but he tells them that he is doing it. Thus he has simultaneously drawn attention to the Thessalonians’ spiritual growth, thereby encouraging them, and insisted that God is the one to be thanked for it, thereby humbling them. *Paul prays that they might be strengthened through loving service to others –* Paul thinks that the best way for the Thessalonians to be strengthened in their faith is through an increase in their love for others, both inside and outside the church.

 *Paul prays for the Thessalonians in light of the future –* in a culture that was oriented to immediate gratification and results, Paul lived in light of eternity rather than the present, and he urged the Thessalonians to do the same. *Paul prays out of his own deep and sincere love for others –* the Thessalonians’ success was the source of his own joy, and his investment of time, energy and prayer in them was because he deeply and genuinely loved them.

*In prayer, Lord, I bring my vision and desires into line with yours. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 15 Ephesians 3:14-21**

“Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians”

 The fatherhood of God is the foundation that determines our responsibility to other people. We cannot ignore the needs of others if we share a common origin in God and a common value before him. Instead, we are to care and get involved, to speak and act to help out. The imagery of the text also challenges our ideas about Jesus. Rather than a small Jesus tucked away somewhere in our souls, the text assumes the presence of the one who gives shape and strength at the core of our being, who takes up residence in and redefines us.

 Paul wants his readers strengthened by God’s Spirit so that they may know intimately Christ’s presence and love. If this happens, all else will fall in place. “Power” and “Spirit” are so commonly associated in both the Old and the New Testament that they are virtually synonymous. The Spirit is the power of God at work in people. Paul prays for his readers that the Spirit will be so strong an influence at the controlling center of their being that their lives will show it.

*May my life be rooted in your love, Lord, which keeps me strong. Amen.*