

Sunday Sermon

6/30/24

Series: Christ our Hope

Passage: 1 Thess. 2:17-3:5

Title: Hope Under Attack

Wow. What a powerful testimony of hope! Thank you to the Soja's for encouraging us toward hope this morning by sharing their story. Good morning, church! Please turn in your bibles to 1 Thess. 2. We are continuing our series this morning "Christ our Hope" by wading out into the concept of relational conflict.

We've been defining hope as the confident expectation of better days ahead. And one of the things that torpedoed hope is this issue of relational conflict. And we are going to address that very issue this morning.

But before we jump in, let's give our time to the Lord. **Pray with me. {Pray}**

So before we jump into the text, we need a little refresher on the issue at hand. Back in Acts 17 the story is recounted. Paul and Silas come to Thessalonica. They reason with the Jews, explaining to them that Jesus is the Christ. It says, some Jews, many Greeks, and not a few women, believed. BUT

It always seems to hinge on the "but." Everything was going awesome "But" some of the people, the Jews in this instance, became jealous and, looking for Paul and Silas, began persecuting the brothers, to the extent (verse 10) it says, ***"The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea."***

And this, right there, is what caused the massive problem, the relational conflict that Paul is dealing with in our passage. Remember where this is happening? This is happening in Thessalonica. Here's a map. Thessalonica is right along the top of the Mediterranean Sea, the northeast corner of what we would call Greece today. And it's cool because, right across this corner of the Aegean Sea, across the way, is Mount Olympus. What you might not realize is that Mount Olympus stands as a backdrop to the city of Thessalonica. Here's a picture of that. Come on. Who wouldn't want to see this in real time? So, if you know anything about Greek mythology, you know that Mount Olympus was regarded as the abode of the gods and was the site of the throne of Zeus who ruled as their king.

And against this backdrop of polytheism, Paul and Silas show up and start preaching, "It's Christ. It's just Christ, no one else." And amazingly, you know, some people are converted. And as often happens when someone gives their heart to Christ, they're like, "This is unbelievable!" They find the Lord and their lives are changed. Then the persecution starts, but we're ok because at least we have each other...and then the guy that preached to them disappears. No goodbye, no when I'll be back, nothing. Some people snuck him away at night because they were afraid that if they didn't take immediate action those who were after Paul were gonna kill him.

Now over to 1 Thessalonians. So, the first part of 1 Thessalonians is Paul recounting how awesome their time was together. But like most letters that start warmly, eventually they have to get down to the issue. And in our passage this morning, 2:17, he gets to the issue, which is to say that he addresses the breach in their relationship caused by a significant misunderstanding based in what happened.

Now just look up here for a second. How often is this true? Everything's going good and then a problem happens in a relationship significant to us - my son, my sister, my spouse, my friend, my pastor. Something is said, something is done that is misunderstood. Listen: **Our strengthening of hope, so often, is tied together with the people that mean the most to us.**

And this passage addresses this very common, very constant issue: when people who care about one another fall into conflict. Here it is:

Main Issue: When my actions or circumstances send a message that's different than my heart, what do I do? When your actions or circumstances send a message that's different than your heart to your mother, your wife, your children, to your friends, **what do you do?**

That's what Paul's addressing. And out of that I have two thoughts for us this morning from the text. Here it is: **When circumstances say you don't care.** Do two things. Here's the first, **When circumstances say you don't care...**

1) Verbalize the value of people. (Express what you really think/feel about them)

That's what Paul does. Look at First Thessalonians 2:17. **(read 17-20)**

There is so much in that passage. Some of the Thessalonians are sitting there like, "He doesn't care. He doesn't care about us. He preached this message. We prayed the prayer. He got us signed up to follow Jesus. Then he just took off. He doesn't care about us." But watch Paul set the record straight. He says, "Please understand. It's not that I don't care, nothing can be farther from the truth. I was **torn away** from you.

That word translated "torn away" means "to bereave." It is the word from which we get our word 'orphan.' Comfortless separation. And what Paul is saying is, "Time out. You think I didn't care? You think I just left because I wanted to? I was torn away from you, like a child torn from its mother's arms. It was an awful separation that that broke my heart."

You see what he's doing? He's using the strongest possible terms to communicate and say, "Hey, I know it looks like this. I know my actions are giving you an impression, but I want you to know that's not where my heart's at." That's why he goes on to say, **"We were torn away from you, brothers..."** Notice: **"for a short time, in person not in heart."** That's awesome. In other words, Paul says, "It's a geography problem. It's not a heart problem. You need to know that I might be down in Athens, but my heart, I still feel like I am, I wish that I was, with you." And I'm counting the minutes and not waiting a second more than it has to be. That's pretty strong. Would any person miss the heart of another if it was verbalized like this? Paul is clearly verbalizing their value.

But he's not done yet, "For a short time, in person not in heart..." And then he uses 3 terms **"we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you..."**

That word **"endeavored"** carries in it the idea of "diligence." This wasn't some passing thing for Paul like, "Well, we tried one time. I'll guess that's not gonna work out." No diligently.

"The more eagerly..." That's the idea of: This isn't something I have to do. This is something I want to do.

We can connect with that, right? How many people have in their life, or in their job, the things that you have to do and things you want to do? I have to mow the lawn. I want to go golfing. Getting back to the Thessalonians, for Paul, is firmly in the "want to" camp. He is verbalizing the value these people hold in his heart because he has adopted for himself a significant Christian truth: that people are precious.

You know, working at a church, I often feel this tension because there are so many things that vie for my attention at any given moment. Sometimes it is easy to get caught up in doing the things we have to do (managing, systems, tasks, even writing a sermon), and in doing so, we end up neglecting the things we want to do, like be a pastor: caring, shepherding, loving well, people. Listen: Time is in great demand, but only people are precious. We need to realize that time is a commodity like anything else that is available to serve the Lord. That's why during the announcements we are often reminded that the greatest gift that we can often give is the gift of our time. Time is a commodity, but we give it because people are precious.

If you go by my office here at the church, you will notice a wheel outside the door and, at times, I need to concentrate so I have on the wheel "do not disturb." But sometimes people, for whatever reason, choose to ignore that recommendation and knock anyway and, listen, that is why you will never hear me say, "Get out of my office! Can't you read the sign!?" Because people are precious. And if whatever is on their heart is important enough to them that they choose to knock anyway, then I want to give them that gift of time and presence.

But working parents, listen up, we need to understand, that tension exists within our families as well. Presence and time spent is a gift, a really important gift – don't neglect to give that gift to those you love *because* people are precious.

And we recognize that we often hold that in tension. **Remember the main issue? Sometimes circumstances happen, sometimes life gets in the way**, sometimes my schedule communicates something to my family that is different than my heart. **So what do I do?** Scripture is painting this picture that **when your circumstances are sending a message that's different than your heart**, listen, you're not dismissive, you're not apathetic, no **you rush to correct the misperception**. And you start by verbalizing the value of other people. "This is how I feel concerning you."

But, in that, we know that no amount of lip-service is going to fill the "hope" balloon. My life practice needs to also bear witness to what I say, so that when I communicate about any misunderstanding, my life and testimony backs it up. "Hey, you know me. You know that's not my heart toward you."

But Paul's not done yet. Notice now after he says those three terms - we endeavor, the more eagerly, with great desire - and then it's very intimate – desire to what? **“To see you face to face.”**

I love this part. Paul will say it again in chapter 3. Listen, Paul isn't looking for a surface makeover. He doesn't want some fake, cheesy, 'we're all just getting along' relationship. That's not face to face.

Face to face is real. It's connection. Have you seen that YouTube video of the little kid who has never seen in his whole life before, and then his mom puts the glasses on and he sees her for the first time? Check this out, I brought it. **[Video]** Did you see the connection? This matter of face is such a big deal.

In fact, it can be quite a battle to break down the resistance to face to face. Because face to face is letting the person in, it's knowledge, it's intimacy. And when Paul says, “The more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face...” What he means is, “I don't want there to be anything in the way of us – knowing and being fully known. Loving and being fully loved. Hoping and being hopeful. Because hope calls us to believe the best and let the false impressions go. And in that, maybe God is calling someone to your mind right now. Someone you need to get face to face with and get to know their heart. To start believing the best and let the false (hear me: the FALSE) impressions go.

This brings us to our second point this morning. We'll come back to verse 18 in a moment.

When circumstances say you don't care: 1) Verbalize the value of other people.

2) Make the sacrifice to correct the false impression. Only in God's Word will you see this kind of sacrificial mindset. Look at what it says...(3:1-5)

Paul says, “I needed to know about you. I had great concern for you.” So much so he says, verse 1, **“We were willing to be left behind...alone” (1)**

I'll bite the bullet. I'll suffer the cost. I'll be the one to sacrifice....Why?

“So that you might have Timothy to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one may be moved by these afflictions.” (2-3)

We were willing to lose for your gain. Why? Why would you do that Paul? Verse 19: He says, **“Because you are our glory and joy.”**

Listen beloved: **Where hope is kept alive someone is always sacrificing** – and most often it is Christ in one of his followers.

You see, when it comes to relational conflict, **hope is protected by love because love remains focused on what matters most.** So let me ask you, spouse, what matters most in your relationship with your husband or wife? Let me ask you, parent, what matters most in your relationship with your child? Friend, fellow church-goer, what matters most in our relationships with one another? Look at what Paul says matters to him in these verses: (5) “your faith,” (3) “your steadfastness,” (19) “you.”

Listen: What matters is our relationship with God and one another. Face to face is a God-like action. In Matt. 27 as Jesus was hanging on the cross, he cries out, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** As Christ took upon himself the sin of the world and endured the divine wrath of the Father, God hid his face, he turned away from the Son – but

listen, why did he do that? He did that, Hebrews 2:10, in order to **bring many sons to glory**. The Father turned his face temporarily from Jesus, so that he could turn his face toward us, and we toward him. Would you do that this morning? God the Father tells us that when we accept Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the eternal payment for our sin, that God removes the sin barrier that keeps us from knowing him face to face. Would you follow Jesus this morning and turn your face toward his? And now God says, "I have done that for you, go do that with one another."

But, in that, we have to understand that, when we begin to do that, there is an enemy at work who is opposed to God and his heart for our relationships. Let's jump back to verse 18 quickly, this might surprise us a bit. Look at how he concludes verse 18, "**But Satan hindered us.**" I gotta say, that's not what you'd expect him to say. "But the Jews! But the authorities!" Typically, when we're talking about relational problems, we don't blame them on Satan. We kind of say, "Well, that's more of a natural problem. You know, the problem is you're just selfish, and I'm just prideful, and he's just stubborn, and she's over-committed. But interestingly, and this is really important as it relates to hope, the Bible doesn't say that the relational problems that tend to torpedo our hope, they're all just of our own making. Turn to your neighbor and say, "It doesn't say that here."

Make a note of this: It is easy for us to forget. **We live in a spiritual world**. And whenever scripture identifies a satanic activity, we are being warned to be vigilant in that area. Ok? So when God's Word says, "Satan's doing this. Satan's involved in this." We need to be wise. And what's his assignment? His assignment is to torpedo hope. Remember hope is a team sport, and real hope is anchored in a person, Jesus Christ. Satan's job is to sever those relationships by any means necessary.

So in closing, I want to, again, just get super practical. How does Satan do that? **3 tactics: Disguise, divide, destroy**. It's just as simple as that. Satan wants to torpedo your hope, and he does it by driving a wedge between you and your spouse, you and your children, you and your friends, you and your church, you and your pastor - any relationship that is supposed to encourage you toward hope.

1 Peter 5:8 says that "**Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.**" Devour is the concept of swallowing entirely. Satan wants to drive you to despair. He wants to make you useless for God's kingdom. 2 Cor. 2:11 says in the context our how important forgiveness is in our relationships, says, "**We are not ignorant of his schemes, so we would not be outwitted by him.**" God's Word makes it very clear what he's doing.

First he disguises, and he makes a thing, that isn't a thing, a thing. And most often, that thing that became a thing, should never have been a thing. But he makes it a thing. He comes as an Angel of Light and says, "Think this way. Feel like this. Question the motives. Believe the worst. That was a personal offense." And he distorts the way we see reality, and he distorts the way we see that other person. And instead of believing the best in the other person, everything that we've ever known about them goes out the window. **Disguise.**

Then comes **tactic 2: divide**. Now he wants to get us on separate teams. Not me with you. Not me for you. Me against you. Mom against dad. Congregant against pastor. A house divided against itself. Get it? And it happens. Over and over and over and over. We need to wise up. It's what he's doing. That's why Corinthians 2:11 says, **“For we are not ignorant of his schemes.”** He's got a way of doing things and we're exposing it right now to the light.

Because then that leads to **destruction**. **“A house divided against itself (what?) cannot stand.”**

What if instead of holding onto hurt or offense, you and I practiced forgiveness and practiced clearing the account? Instead of division, go tell the person they are deeply loved. That might be God voice to someone today. If you get out of church today, you get on the phone and say, look, here's the bottom line. I love you. Whatever has happened, whatever I've said, whatever impression you've gotten, clear the account and thwart Satan's plans to disguise, divide, and destroy.

What if we did that? Question: Why would we do that? Because that is what honors the Lord. Because it keeps us free. Because that is how we “walk worthy” before a God rich in mercy. **When circumstances say you don't care: 1) Verbalize the value of other people. 2) Make the sacrifice to correct the false impression**, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan, and lose our hope.

A composite image featuring a city skyline, mountains, a sun, and birds, with the text "CHRIST OUR HOPE" overlaid. The scene is set against a background of a blue sky with white clouds. In the center, there is a circular cutout showing a city skyline with various skyscrapers, including a prominent blue one on the left and a tall, thin one on the right. Behind the city, there are green mountains with patches of snow. A large, bright sun is partially visible behind the city. Several birds are flying in the sky above the city. The text "CHRIST OUR HOPE" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the city and the sun. There are also some green trees and pink flowers at the bottom of the circular cutout.

CHRIST OUR HOPE

Hope

*The confident expectation
of better days ahead*



CHRIST OUR HOPE



ROME

Philippi

Thessalonica

GALATIA

Ephesus

Tarsus

Antioch

Corinth

Colossae

Malta

Damascus

Jerusalem



Main Issue:

When my actions or circumstances send a message that's different than my heart, what do I do?

When circumstances say you don't care...

1) Verbalize the value of people.

“But since we were torn away from you, brothers...”

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***“But since we were torn away from you, brothers,
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we endeavored the more eagerly
and with great desire to see you...”***

Main Issue:

When my actions or circumstances send a message that's different than my heart, what do I do?

You rush to correct the misperception.

When circumstances say you don't care...

1) Verbalize the value of people.

“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”



When circumstances say you don't care...

- 1) Verbalize the value of people.**
- 2) Make the sacrifice to correct the false impression.**

“We were willing to be left behind...alone”

When circumstances say you don't care...

- 1) Verbalize the value of people.**
- 2) Make the sacrifice to correct the false impression.**

“We were willing to be left behind...alone, and we sent Timothy...to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.”

“For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.”

- Heb. 2:10

***“Because we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, again
and again - but Satan hindered us.”***

- 1 Thess. 2:18

***“Because we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, again
and again - but Satan hindered us.”***

- 1 Thess. 2:18

**3 Tactics of the Enemy:
*Disguise - Divide - Destroy***

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

- 1 Peter 5:8

“For we are not ignorant of his schemes, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan.”

- 2 Cor. 2:11

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

- Matt. 12:25