

Keeping the Faith

by Jim Cymbala

Faith is the foundation of a strong Christian life, and Satan attacks it through trials, persecutions, materialism, and distractions, but God uses these trials to build faith and make us more like Christ.

Duration: 26:05

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 1:17, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5, Hebrews 10:38, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Endurance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of faith in Christianity. He dismisses the significance of external elements like PowerPoint presentations and praise and worship songs, stating that they are not the essence of the faith. The preacher highlights that becoming a Christian involves confessing sins, turning away from them, and putting faith in Jesus as the Savior. He also shares a personal experience of being attacked in his faith by the enemy, but he overcomes it by declaring that Satan is a liar.

Transcript

So we're gonna pick up where we left off a while back in this study of 1 Thessalonians that we're doing. And we're gonna cover a bunch of verses in the third chapter, I'll show you that in a moment. It just struck me again, this fact, that what we call the Holy Bible and that what we call the New Testament, which is inspired by God, is really a letter written by a man who it never seems they knew that it would be part of the New Testament.

So when the Apostle Paul was writing to this church at Thessalonica, he was just trying to take care of business. He was just trying to get things done. He was concerned about the church.

Now, how God would use a letter like that, inspire it so that we would learn the things he wants us to know. So as we read this, it's not just a letter from Paul to the church at Thessalonica, it's like a letter to us in many ways so that we can gather what are the lessons for us, what are the lessons for the choir. Now, the context of this passage is, for those of you who haven't been around for the beginning, that Paul founded the church in Thessalonica, which is in Greece.

This is the first time the gospel ever came to the country, to what we call Greece. He started in a place called Philippi, where he preached, started a church, but then got a beat down, arrested, thrown in the slammer. God delivered him out of that, and after a lot of trouble and persecution and yet victory at the

same time in spreading the word, he went on to Thessalonica.

He was there for, they're not sure, three to six months at the max, it seems, but he started a church. How'd he do that? No New Testament, no microphones, no public buildings. What we're meeting in here today, no one knew anything about something like this for 300 years, once Christianity began.

There were no public buildings where you say, I'm going to church. It was home meetings out in the woods, in caves, in all kinds of places, usually with the heat on, if you know what I mean. Lot of pressure.

So Paul left, and now a year later, he's writing this letter, and he's reminding them about why he sent Timothy to see them, because he had been away for a year, and he knew they were going through persecutions and trials and difficulties, and he wanted to find out about their faith. Everyone say faith. Faith.

Not how much money they're making, not what kind of houses they live in, or what kind of cars they were driving. Those are superfluous things. He wanted to find out about their faith.

We don't talk that way, but we should, because it's in the word of God. So now he's reminding them, I sent Timothy, Timothy came back with a report about your faith, and now I'm writing this letter, which he'll probably send Timothy back to deliver it. Remember that also, these letters were read publicly by probably the senior pastor of the church.

So when these letters came, someone stood in the front of the meeting and said, this comes from our beloved Apostle Paul, our spiritual father, and they read it out loud. And the church could learn more about Jesus. So now we pick it up, 1 Thessalonians chapter three, verse one.

So, this language, would to God, all God help us today that all pastors, starting with this one, would love their people like Paul loved the church at Thessalonica. They wouldn't just do it for a salary, but they would love the people. So when we could stand it no longer, sounds like a boyfriend separated from his girl, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and coworker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your what? So that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. What? The trials.

In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your what? I was afraid that in some way, the tempter, i.e. Satan, the devil, had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

And in fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith.

I was afraid during this time of trial and persecution that in some way, the tempter tempted you and that our labor, all the stuff we poured into you, might turn out to be for naught in vain. So what can we gather from that? Some of it is just personal. We don't know Timothy, we never met him.

We don't live in Thessalonica, but what are the living lessons from this passage? Number one, you see that Paul, as an apostle, this great man of God with his spiritual children, the main thing that he's interested in is in their spiritual pulse. And what is their spiritual pulse? Faith. What's the devil want to destroy? Faith.

How are we to walk? By faith. How are we to worship? By faith. How are we to pray? Full of faith.

When you lose faith, you have no more relationship with God. This is the critical one. Notice, he's not asking how many are running on Sundays, what kind of building are you meeting in, are you doing PowerPoint, what's the news praise and worship song you're doing? All of that stuff is just Americana, it's all stuff we've developed, but it's not the essence of Christianity.

What's the essence? That just shall live by faith. What Paul had done when he preached the gospel, the people responded by putting their faith in Jesus. How do you become a Christian? You confess your sins, you turn from them, and you put your faith in Jesus as your savior, that he came and died on a cross 2,000 years ago, that he shed his blood for us, gave up his life so that we would live.

Amazing love, how could it be? So he wants to know about their faith. If their faith is strong, they'll be strong Christians. If their faith gets weak, they'll be weak Christians, and he's intimating here that if the tempter does his work and destroys their faith, his work would be for naught, for nothing.

So it's all about faith. That's why the Bible says, encourage each other every day. Encourage for what? To build up their faith.

And faith doesn't stay static. Faith can grow, we know, and you can lose your faith. You can have men and women of great faith and churches of great faith who God is so real to them, and then you can just have people gathering where it's just perfunctory and traditional, and they have no more faith than the man in the moon.

It's not living, it's not alive. Notice everything hangs on faith. Every time you mingle with another believer, you have to understand, I don't know her that well, personally, she's, Satan is attacking her faith.

I know that. That's a given, that's a given. He's anti-Christ, he's against Christ and the faith that we have in Christ.

So every discouragement, every distraction. Listen, every discouragement, every trial, every difficulty, every time the bottom falls out, every time your heart is broken, every time someone puts a knife in your back and you're hurt emotionally, he's gonna use that to try to destroy your faith. Every distraction of the world, making money, the cares of life, paying bills, what's gonna happen, terrorism, Zika, and every other kind of thing, it's to distract us away from faith in Christ.

That's where the whole battle is. No wonder Paul says, I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith.

That's the battle. So notice here that what Paul is writing, you're not gonna hear much in America. You'll hear it in mainland China.

You'll hear it in the Middle East. You'll hear it in many countries with the gospel spreading. Notice how he just tells them, why I couldn't stand it any longer and I had to find out how you were doing.

I gotta know how you're doing. Why? Because I know you were going through trials and persecution, but you remember, you weren't surprised by that, guys, in Thessalonica, were you? Because I told you when I was there, part of the whole package of following Jesus is you're gonna get lit up. You're not gonna hear that in America.

It's not good salesmanship. What minister says, oh, by the way, come to Christ. Yes, he died for your sins and he'll forgive you and you can have the promise of eternal life that when you die, you'll be with him.

And by the way, while you serve him, they're gonna come at you with all the guns blazing. They're gonna persecute you. We're gonna be mocked.

We're gonna be laughed at. We're gonna be sneered at. But worse for them, who knows what he's referring to.

Did they lose their jobs because of their faith? Were some of them thrown in prison? Did someone die? Persecution against Christians in the first century or two got into some heavy business, not in all places of the Roman Empire, not under all emperors, but some emperors like Diocletian and some others, they just lit the fuse and said, go after them and kill them. Drive them out, persecute them. They're not loyal to the Roman Empire.

They won't bow to Caesar. They won't call him God. Kill them.

And that was part of being a Christian back then. And Paul said, I told you about them. And we live in a more soft, materialistic, market-driven world.

So people are selling Jesus. So you'll see the televangelist just saying, you know, God wants you to follow your dream and everything's gonna work out. Just stay away from negative people and follow your destiny and all of that.

That is not a message you will find in the New Testament. It's follow Jesus, but with it is gonna come some trouble along the way, attacks by Satan, people turning on you. Do I get an amen here from anybody? Your family turning against you.

There are some believers in our church, former of Jewish faith and Muslims and others, strong Roman Catholic backgrounds, who when coming to this church, family cut them off. They don't even talk to them. Our missionary in Israel, Leah, when she found Yeshua as her Messiah, her mother stopped talking to her, I think for something like 20 years.

How shameful that you believe in Christ. Hitler was a Christian and all that. So notice what Paul just assumes here.

So we shouldn't be thrown off. He taught them and warned them. When you serve Jesus, there's gonna be trouble, but it's worth the trouble because he gave his life.

So how many are ready to put up with a little trouble? Lift up your hand high. We're ready to put up with, and listen, I'm not a prophet here, but it seems to me that in America, we're looking at more opposition to Christianity, not less coming up. And Christian teaching is gonna be linked now to hate speech and a lot of other clever things that they're using to try to marginalize people who follow Christ.

So now let's get back. Here's the interesting thing I wanna conclude with. The very testing and persecution and trial that Satan could use, God uses the same trial to build your faith.

So every time we're in a difficult place, we're in a difficult situation, there's a battle going on. Satan wants to use it to say, where's your God? I thought he loved you. Where is he? Where's your answer to your prayer? Where's your Jesus now that you need him? To try to get us to look away from the promise of God, to not trust God.

God is using it because just like lifting weights builds your biceps and your triceps, and lifting weights, that's opposition, you know, gravity going and the weight. Resistance builds muscles. Trouble builds faith.

How are you gonna help anybody when they're going through something if you haven't gone through it yourself? And you have a testimony. You got the test, and now you got a testimony, and now you can help somebody, and they'll go, you don't know what I'm going through. Oh yes, I do.

I've been there, and God brought me through, and he's gonna bring you through. Come on, let's say amen to that. I found peace in Jesus.

You can find peace in Jesus. He calmed the storm inside of me. He'll get you through that.

I know it's hard, but he'll get you through that. And Satan's gonna try to use this test for his aim and purpose. God wants to use it for his aim and purpose to make you more like Christ, make you a strong believer so you can feed others.

Not just make it through, not just keep going, but be a blessing. Bless so that we can be a blessing. So now that's the battle.

So let me just conclude with this. Faith is attacked at two different times. Satan uses one or the other.

In times of plenty, in times of blessing, and in a society that's filled with things, not persecution, not trial, Satan uses that to blind us to invisible realities. Listen, the more money and credit cards and physical things become prominent in our lives and become our world, then the invisible things of God become less real and he'll ebb your faith away. Jesus warned about that.

Be careful of the cares of life. Be weighed down, your heart will get weighed down by everything around you, things you see. And now with the internet and now with, you don't have to go to a store, you can just order online.

Just, you're surrounded by that. And the next thing you know, that's your only world. The value of a soul, the power of prayer, the beauty of worship, you don't even, I don't even know what you're talking about.

That's why people who are materialistic, who don't believe in Christ, don't understand Christians praising God. They think it's silly, why? Because their only world is things you can touch and feel. But we don't walk by sight, we walk by faith.

Oh, isn't it good to just praise God? Let's just lift our hands up. Come on, everybody. Come on, let's just close your eyes and just give God some praise with your mouth.

Just give him some praise right now. Come on, praise him for something he's done for you. We praise you, God.

We don't see you, but we praise you by faith. Give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good. His love endures.

You may put your hands down. See, we do that by faith. We do that by faith.

So that's one of the tools Satan uses. Surrounded by so much stuff that you lose the invisible God who wants to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. But let's get back to the main thing they were going through.

They were going through pain. They were going through trials. Pastor Brian counsels a lot of people, so do I, Pastor Burgos does, Pastor Hammond has counseled all kinds of people, and you hear it over and over again.

They come in your office, and you might be here today, and the bottom fell out. Maybe you're not being persecuted in the classical sense for your faith, but there's trouble in your life. A son or a daughter has wounded you.

A guy walked out on you, a husband walked out on you. Lost your job, now how are you gonna make a living? Bills this high, money this high. And Satan uses those.

Where's your God? What's up with this? Where's your God? And there's the test. He just wants to tell you God doesn't love you, God doesn't care about you. This is why Paul sent Timothy to that church.

What? To strengthen and encourage their faith. The word strengthen means to build, make strong, erect. To strengthen their foundation and their faith so that they know about God and who he is.

The word encourage your faith is a word of comfort. It means when you use words to try to see someone healed inside where they've been hurt. Notice, to strengthen and encourage your faith.

That's my job today. I wanna strengthen and encourage your faith. Because Satan comes and he tells all these lies.

One time when I needed, I don't know, over a million dollars in 72 hours when we were building all of this. You know, it never costs what they say and it never takes what they say usually. So there were overruns and change orders and all this stuff and they would just call me and we were just trusting God.

God was supplying, but one battle after another. And I had been traveling and I had been preaching and I'm trying to write books and all the royalties go to the church. I'm trying to do my best.

But what in the world are you gonna do when they keep calling and saying we need 700,000 in four days or we need 1.2 million in three days? What are you gonna do? I don't know any wealthy people. If you're wealthy, come up to my office after the meeting so I can say I know someone wealthy. And one day alone in my bed, Carol was in Florida.

Oh, the enemy came in. That was hard. I leaped out of the bed and I felt this presence in the room.

You could say it's all melodrama, say whatever you want. I lived through that. There was a darkness and I heard like laughing in my mind like you're a jerk.

You're talking all about God and he's done this and he supplied that and this and you've written books. But you know what? You're a joke. You're a joke.

This thing's not gonna get done. You're not gonna get that money. And now what are you gonna do with a church 80% done that you can't move in, get a CFO, get a public assembly? What are you gonna do? How are you gonna face the people? Oh, it was strong.

How many have ever been attacked in your faith, in your mind? Oh, this was strong. I'm not making this up. I got out of my bed and I was all alone, so I was vulnerable.

I started walking around the room. I can remember my heart beating and all I could say was, Satan, you're a liar. You're a liar.

You're a liar, Satan, you're a liar. But you know what? It wasn't ringing true to me. It was like, no, and just like this, just attacking my faith.

But I wanna tell you something. God knows what you're going through. Number two, he loves you.

And number three, I promise you on the authority of God's word, he will see you through. He will get you through. Come on, can we say amen to that? He will get you through.

And God miraculously supplied that money, sometimes in the weirdest, strangest ways. You couldn't even make it up. Someone has said to me, my publisher, Zondervan, has said, you oughta write a book just all the ways God blessed the church and helped the church through this building project.

This was nothing, nada, no money. We started it with no money. How do you get into a dozens and dozens and millions of dollar project with no money? But God is able.

But along the way, there's attacks. If you're here today, you're a minister, you're a missionary, and he's attacking your faith. You're up in the balcony, he's attacking your faith.

The enemy's attacking your faith. I'm here to strengthen your faith. I'm here to encourage your faith.

I'm your Timothy today. Notice, God is the one who does it, but he uses people, he uses people very often. He can come when you're reading the word, he can come when you're worshiping God and strengthen your faith, but many times he uses people talking to you and saying, listen, he knows what you're going through.

Look at me, he knows what you're going through. Oh no, God's forgotten you, he doesn't have his eye on you anymore. That's a lie.

Do you listen, listen to me, that's a lie. God knows exactly where you are. He knows what you feel, people behind me, in ways that you can't even convey in words.

You know those feelings, you can't tell anybody? He knows about those, and he loves you. Listen, if he already gave you his son, how would he not help you now? Could I get an amen? If he already gave us his son, how would he not help us? He gave us his son when we didn't even know him. Now we're his children.

Keep your faith. I was reading in my devotions yesterday, the Last Supper, Peter's boasting that he'll never fail the Lord, and Jesus says, Simon, Simon. Listen, Simon, Simon.

Satan has asked it to sift you. Sift what? Your faith. He's asked to sift you like wheat.

But I prayed for you that you won't have your faith fail, and when you get back up from the fall that you're gonna take, which you don't know because you're so full of yourself, when you get back up from this bad episode, strengthen your brothers. Strengthen what? Their faith. It's not over till it's over.

God's gonna keep holding on to us. Come on, can't we celebrate that? God's gonna hold on to us. We've all been through these battles.

You've been through them, I've been through them, and if you're through a battle today, get up out of your seat right now. I'm not gonna ask people to stand or anything. Just get up out of your seat and come here to the front because we will pray that God will strengthen your faith.

Encourage your faith. If you're under attack, just get up and come up and stand and say, look, Pastor Semble, what you went through, I'm going through. I'm going through it.

The pain of desertion or someone turning on you. A situation that looks so bad, doesn't make sense. Father God, we thank you for your word today.

What a good word for us. The just shall live by faith. Strengthen our faith.

Encourage our faith. For all my precious brothers and sisters here in the front, you know what they're going through. Wrap your arms around them.

Brace up their back. Strengthen their arms. Strengthen the knees that are wobbling.

We're not gonna go under, we're gonna go over. You know what we are going through? Like you did that night in my bedroom. You know what we feel and you love us and we will be victorious through Jesus Christ.

We will be victorious. We will be victorious through Jesus Christ. Increase our faith.

Strengthen it, encourage it. Help us to be like those trees. The roots go down so deep so that when the winds come, the tree won't go over because the roots are too far down.

Let our roots go down deep into you, Lord. Feed us your word every day so our faith can grow. Make us men and women of prayer.

Make us a church full of prayer in your word and your spirit. Thank you that we can love each other. God, every time we're together with one another, let us be more conscious, how can I encourage her faith? How can I encourage his faith? What word of encouragement can I give? That's our prayer today.

And when persecution and sneering or difficulty comes, no big thing, for God is with us. What can man do unto me, your word says. Bless us as we go our separate ways.

We just thank you we could be together today. In Jesus' name, and everyone said. Amen.

Turn around and hug somebody. Men, hug a man. Women, hug some women.

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