

# THE EPIC LIFE – BOB HALLMAN

## The Priorities of the Kingdom

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

2010

### Introduction

Stephen Covey in his book, *First Things First*, illustrates the importance of establishing priorities at his time management conferences using a gallon jar, a pile of fist sized rocks, some gravel, some sand and some water.

**Volunteers:** Given 3 minutes to put everything in the jar

**Point of the exercise:** You have to put the big rocks in first!

In our text today, Paul is highlighting the big rocks of ministry!

- a. The Word of God
- b. The reality of suffering and God's justice
- c. The importance of relationships
- d. The promised reward for faithful service

### I The Thessalonians Responded to the Word

1 Thess 1:2 “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.”

*Always* = Aialeiptos = "Uninterruptedly, without ceasing"

Rom 1:9-10 “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly [Aialeiptos] I remember you in my prayers at all times.”

2 Tim 1:3 "I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly [Aialeiptos] remember you in my prayers."

#### Why was Paul so committed to prayer?

1. Because Jesus Christ modeled it!
2. Because the New Testament church practiced it!
3. Because Paul was convinced of its power!

A. They **heard** the Word of God [Verse 13a]

**Heard** = Akoe = “To hear with the intent to apply”

Heb 1:1-2 “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”

Rom 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

**Application:** The importance of the proclamation of the Word

Rom 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”

B. They received the Word of God [Verse 13b]

**Received** = Paralambano = “To learn or welcome”

It is especially used in the New Testament of receiving a message or body of instruction or doctrine:

1 Cor 15:1-4 “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received [Paralambano] and on which you have taken your stand ... For what I received [Paralambano] I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ...”

C. They **accepted** the Word of God: [Verse 13c]

**Accepted** = Dechomai = “To personally embrace or believe”

They had an appetite for the Word of God (received & welcomed), and then immediately put it to work in their lives!

John 17:8 “**For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.**”

1. Not as the word of men, but as the Word of God

**Question:** *Is the Bible a collection of humanly inspired mythological stories, filled with good words and thought provoking concepts – or is it the Word of God?* Your answer to that question will send you on one of two very different paths in life.

**The Unitarian Universalist Association statement of faith:**

"We believe that personal experience, conscience, and reason should be the final authorities in religion. In the end, religious authority lies not in a book or person or institution, but in us. We put religious insights to the test of our hearts and minds."

*Our Faith.* UUAC. <https://uuac.org/our-faith/>

**The Apostle Paul's statement of faith:**

Gal 1:11-12 “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”

2 Tim 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The Thessalonian believers understood and affirmed that Paul's message was not merely the product of a highly trained mind, but a supernatural gift from God that was to be welcomed, understood and fully obeyed.

2. Which was at **work** in them who believed

The words of human beings, however wise in substance or eloquent in expression, cannot produce spiritual life; this is the exclusive domain of the Word of God, which is at work (energeitai) in those who believe!

By this same Word of God:

- a. We are saved - 1 Cor 15:1-2; James 1:18
- b. Our hearts, intentions and thoughts are examined - Heb 4:12
- c. Our hearts and minds are washed - Eph 5:26
- d. We grow in faith – Rom 10:17
- e. Our minds are transformed - Rom 12:2

## II The Thessalonians Imitated the Faith of Others

- A. They became **imitators** of God's churches in Judea [Verse 14]  
*Imitators* = Mimetes = "To mimic or emulate"

**Imitators of whom?** The churches in Judea!

**Who had the churches in Judea imitated?** Paul, who was persecuted at Iconium, Derbe, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

**Who had Paul imitated?** The disciples and Jesus Himself!

1 Cor 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

1. They suffered from their own countrymen

Paul comforted these suffering Christians with the assurance that they were not the first to suffer this way.

*Note:* In almost every case in the early days of the church, it was God's own people who were the most violent opponents of the Gospel. And what they could not do directly to destroy it themselves, they incited the Gentiles to do on their behalf.

2. They suffered the same things from the Jews [Verse 15a]

1 Thess 1:6-7 "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."

- a. From those who **killed** the Lord Jesus

Acts 3:15 "You killed the author of life ..."

- b. From those who killed the prophets

Acts 7:52 "Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They

even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One.”

c. From those who **drove out** Paul and his friends

This is a reference to Paul’s experience recorded in Acts 17:5-10 when he and his companions were driven from the city of Thessalonica for preaching the Gospel.

**Application:** If you are a follower of Christ – you are a target of Satan and his servants – demonic and human!

Luke 6:22-23 “**Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.**”

B. They suffered at the hands of those who: [Verse 15b-16]

1. **Displease** God

**Displease** = Aresko = “To be disagreeable”

The present tense stresses the chronic rebellion of the Jewish leaders who rejected Christ and turned the majority of the nation away from the Lord.

Ironic, in light of the fact that the Jewish leaders thought they were:

- a. Guides for the blind - Matt 23:16-17
- b. Offering service to God - John 16:2
- c. Zealous for and pleasing to God - Rom 10:2-3

2. Are **hostile** to all men in their effort:

**Hostile** = Enantios = “To be antagonistic, adversarial, opposed, contrary”

Not merely passive unbelief – but direct and aggressive opposition!

a. To keep us from speaking to the Gentiles

Which was Paul’s calling from God:

Eph 3:8 “Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ...”

b. To keep Gentiles from being **saved**

Jesus addressed the wickedness of the Jewish leaders when he told them in

Matt 23:13: “**Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.**”

3. Always **heap up** their sins to the limit

**Heap up** = Anapleroo = “To complete, fully supply, fill up”

a. They rejected the Messiah and the Gospel

- b. They rejected their mission by hindering others from receiving the message.
  - 1. They were ordained by God to be a light to the Gentiles – Is 42:6
  - 2. They refused – out of jealousy, envy and prejudice – to fulfill their God-given calling.
  - 3. They rejected God’s prophets, murdered His Son, and were now openly at war with God’s ambassadors.

Matt 23:32 “**Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!**”

- 4. Are at last experiencing the wrath of God  
**Wrath** = Orge = "A settled, determined indignation”

Nahum 1:3 "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished."

#### How does God bring his wrath?

- 1. Personally
  - Gal 6:7-8 “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”
  - Rom 1:18-20 “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.”
- 2. Nationally: Famine, plague, earthquakes, wars, etc.  
**Example:** The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by Rome
- 3. Universally, during the Great Tribulation (AKA “the time of Jacob’s distress” – Jer 30:7)
- 4. Personally, at the Great White Throne Judgment – Revelation 20.  
 Rom 2:5 “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”

**Gospel Message:** He will not leave not leave the guilty unpunished – unless they hear, receive and accept the atoning work of Jesus Christ who took upon Himself the fullness of the Father’s hatred for sin when He bore the full force of God’s divine fury on the cross.

### III The Thessalonians Were Loved by Paul

- A. Paul was **torn away** from them for a short time: [Verse 17a]  
**Torn away** = Aporphanizo (orphan) = To be bereaved wholly, separated”

1. In person
2. Not in thought

Col 2:5 “For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit ...”

In 1 Thess 2:7, 11, Paul described himself as a wet nurse or father in his care for the church. But here he represents himself as bereaved of his children.

B. Paul had an intense **longing** for them [Verse 17b]

**Longing** = Epithumia = “To long for deeply (often sexual in usage)”

Used only two times in the New Testament in a non-sexual context:

1. Jesus at the last supper

Luke 22:15 “And he said to them, **“I have eagerly desired [Epithumia] to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”**

2. Paul when referring to his longing for heaven

Phil 1:23-24 “I am torn between the two: I desire [Epithumia] to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”

**Application:** Paul loved the believers in Thessalonica! Why?

1. They belonged to the same family -- the family of God.
2. Paul was filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit - Gal 5:22
3. Paul was obedient to the command to love others - Jn 13:34-35
4. But most importantly -- Paul had prayed for them!

Nothing will produce a genuine love for others like prayer.

C. Paul made every effort to see them [Verse 17c]

1. He wanted to come to them

Rom 1:13 “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.”

2. Satan stopped them

**Stopped** = Enkopto = “To thwart or impede one's course by cutting off his way.”

Satan will do all he can to hinder, neutralize, or destroy us:

1. He will use *human opposition* (inside and outside the church) – David
2. He will challenge *us materially or physically* – Job
3. He will oppress us with *discouragement or depression* – Elijah  
**Psychological warfare:** He invites us to quit and go AWOL!
4. He will work through the *general philosophies, ideologies, and myths of the world* – False teachers
5. He will work through *politics, economics, government, the work place*

6. He will *delay* answers to our prayers – Daniel 10:12-13

**But, always remember:**

1. Satan's attacks are permitted by God for His glory (i.e. Job)
2. Satan's schemes are harnessed by God for the strengthening of the believer - James 1:2-4
3. Satan will soon be crushed - Rom 16:20

D. Paul expressed his love for the Thessalonians: [Verse 19-20]

1. They were his **hope**

“Hope” refers to the confident expectation that existed in Paul's heart in light of the prophetic promises of the Word. Hope involves what has not taken place, but is confidently expected through faith.

**Keep in mind that Paul had forsaken all for the Gospel:**

1. Relationships: Family, spouse, friends, peers
2. Career: Sanhedrin, Judaism, influence, power
3. Comfort: Financial stability, pleasure, a life of ease, personal safety

**The Thessalonian believers were:**

1. Paul's seal of our apostleship
2. Paul's confidence of God's future reward
  - a. The faithful gardener will be rewarded - 1 Cor 3:8-9
  - b. The expert builder will be rewarded - 1 Cor 3:10-15

2. They were his joy

There are few things that bring more joy than seeing people that a person has led to Christ walking worthy of their calling, growing in the Lord, making disciples and bearing fruit in every good work.

1 Thess 3:7-9 “Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?”

3 John 4 “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

3. They were his crown of **glory**

Paul also called the Philippians his “joy and crown” - Phil 4:1

Paul undoubtedly had in mind the “stephanos” (victor's crown) rewarded to those who had been victorious in competition.

This crown will be rewarded to believers at “Bema Seat Judgment” of Christ!

**Illustration:** Jiu Jitsu award of a strip of medical tape for most improved!

The sensei, Jerod, awarded the most improved student with a strip of medical tape wrapped around his gi belt. The award itself (like a laurel wreath) was virtually worthless, but was of great value to the recipient because it represented the approval of the one whose approval mattered most. In a similar fashion, the victor's laurel crown is meaningful, not because of its inherent value, but because of the one who awards it.

**Who will receive this crown of glory?**

- a. Those who fulfill the Great Commission - Mt 28:18-20
- b. Those who persevere under trial - James 1:12
- c. Those who have undershepherded God's flock - 1 Pet 5:4
- d. Those who have fought the good fight, finished their race, kept the faith and are longing for His appearing - 2 Tim 4:8

**Conclusion**

1. For unbelievers: The biggest ROCK of all – Jesus Christ!!
  - a. Hear, receive and accept the Word as it is – the very Word of God!
2. Believers:
  - b. Make sure you put the BIG ROCKS IN FIRST!!
    1. Love God
    2. Love others
    3. Make disciples
      - 1 Cor 9:24-27 “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

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