**God’s Elevator Pitch**

**1 Thessalonians ch. 3**

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alfway through year 1 A.D. Greece is drenched in idolatry and lechery. Athenians bowed to more than 3,000 false gods. Despite its intellect, this cradle of civilization could not identify the one, true God. Even the Jews, they too fell prey to paganism’s enticements (Psalm 115:1-8).

As a prominent Pharisee in Jerusalem, Saul set out to destroy all who’d come to be called Christians. Now called Paul, totally transformed by the risen Christ, he’s unveiling radical news. He calls it “the secret” or “the mystery” because God chose not to announce it until after Jesus had returned to heaven, after the Jewish people had fully rejected Christ as their Messiah (Ephesians 3:1-6; Colossians 1:25-29).

The resurrected Jesus called Paul up to the third heaven and entrusted him with a *new* way to be *“saved”* –- not by being religious. Instead of trying to earn God’s favor, we must simply *“believe”* (hheaton1961

ave faith in) what Christ did for us on the cross. *Everyone* can have *all* their sins *permanently* forgiven by trusting in Christ (2 Corinthians 12:1-4; Romans 4:4-8; Galatians 3:10-14).

Driven from Thessalonica by paid rioters, Paul goes to Athens and agonizes over the new converts he’d left behind to face brutal opposition. Unable to go himself, Paul sends Timothy while he returns to Corinth where he writes this letter (Acts 18:1-6).

Let’s read today’s target passage: 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:1-13).

*Strength, A Gift Of Suffering*

*1 Thessalonians 3:1–5*

Paul had warned the new converts they’d be abused for their faith. But being persecuted doesn’t mean God’s ticked at them. No way!

Instead, God turns our train wrecks into an opportunity to lean into Him even more, making us stronger to face what’s thrown at us (Philippians 1:28-30; 1 Peter 4:12-16).

DISCUSS: What gift did you find in suffering? How did it change you?

*The Heavenly Man* is the story of one of China's house church leaders, Liu Zhenying, aka Brother Yun. He was born in 1958 into a poor family in Henan province. His mother considered suicide when her husband fell ill. One night she heard a voice say “Jesus loves you.” The family prayed; hours later the dad began improving, and all of them, including 16-year-old Yun, gave their lives to Christ.

For 100 days he ate only one bowl of rice a day and prayed to get a Bible. In a vision he saw someone carrying bread that when eaten became the Scriptures. When he awoke, at his door was the man he’d seen in his vision who was now handing Yun a Bible!

At 17 he was arrested the first of many times and jailed three times by the Communists. Once in captivity he supernaturally went without food and water for 74 days. He was often beaten to cripple him permanently, tortured with electric batons, kicked, trampled and had needles jammed under his fingernails.

In 1997 God told Yun to escape from maximum security. His legs completely crushed, he miraculously strode to freedom, passing dozens of guards as though invisible. God had healed his legs!

In 2001 Yun fled to Germany, having introduced thousands to Christ. He founded “Back to Jerusalem” which sends missionaries from China to the least-reached nations, many of which are, to this day, guilty of atrocities against people of faith.

Yun wrote, “The path of every believer will sooner or later include suffering. God allows it to keep us humble and dependent on Him” (Acts 5:16-42). When we thank God for our hardships, we tap into His strength and find that it’s enough (Matthew 5:11-12).

DISCUSS: What comfort do you need, or are now receiving from God?

*“Greece Is The (Good) Word That You Heard”*

*1 Thessalonians 3:6-11*

Hearing from Timothy that the Thessalonians were growing in their faith and love boosted Paul’s spirits amid his own adversity. He longed to be with them in person to build up their faith even more.

DISCUSS: Why do we need to get and give encouragement to each other?

*What The World Needs Now*

*1 Thessalonians 3:12-13*

Paul wants his readers to experience and export the same unconditional, sacrificial, *agape’* love Jesus had for you and me as He hung naked, nailed to that cross, wearing a crown of thorns, given vinegar to slake His thirst and having spears pierce His side. That Love inspires us to even love our enemies (Romans 12:9-21; 1 John 4:7-11, 19-21)!

We have the opportunity to tell others that God is not angry with them. Quite the contrary! He loves them totally. His Son’s death has paid the penalty for *all* of their sins – past, present and future! Nothing we could do -- or fail to do – could ever make God rescind His promise to never forsake us (Romans 8:1, 35-39).

DISCUSS: What prevents us from telling this world-shaking news to all?

*God Just Called To Say “I Love You”*

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