**November 17, 2019** 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

***Prepared For What Lies Ahead***

**Scripture:** *2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 NRSV*

*(6)Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. (7)For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, (8)and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. (9)This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. (10)For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. (11)For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. (12)Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. (13)Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.*

*Luke 21:10-12 NRSV (10)Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; (11)there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. (12)"But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.*

**Notes:**

1. Paul tells them to be ***responsible*** and get back to ***work***.
   1. There’s a time to ***work*** and a time to relax.
   2. ***Christians*** should jump right in.
   3. Make the most of our ***talent*** and ***time***.
   4. Being ready for Christ means ***obeying*** him in ***every*** area of life.
2. When it comes to following God, are we truly ***prepared***?
   1. ***Followers*** of Jesus will face persecution and betrayal.
   2. Those who endure to the end will gain their ***soul***.
   3. Following Him, we gain an ***intimacy*** which survives
   4. Loyalty to Christ ***endures*** hardships.
3. God promises everlasting ***rest*** in the Savior’s arms.
   1. Prepare our ***hearts*** for the reign of God.
   2. Allow God’s spirit to saturate ours with His ***holiness***.
   3. We’ve got a ***job*** to do.
4. The cross of Christ demands our ***whole*** self.
   1. ***Everyone*** must work for the good of God’s kingdom.
   2. Keep moving ***together***; A faith that endures prepares itself through ***hardship***.
   3. We must ***work*** together, finding ways to ***contribute*** to and ***build*** up the body.
   4. The invitation to ***Christian*** ***living*** is an invitation to come and die to ***self*** so we might discover a new and better life in Christ.

**Transcript:**

It was the summer of 1993, I had planned a vacation to Colorado and Arizona for Myself, Jan, and my parents. The gist of this trip was to visit some relatives and friends while there we also planned to take in the sites of the surrounding area. One of the sites was Pikes peak. I had been there before on a previous trip in 1991. I had gone with my cousins all the way to the top and enjoyed every moment along the way.

On this particular day in early July, we began our journey to the top; let me say we were utterly unprepared for the trek. First of all, our vehicle was tuned for the Pennsylvania summer; low altitude, warm sunny days; in Colorado Springs, it was an exceptionally chilly day, and on the Peak, it was snowing and temperatures were holding around freezing. As we started up the mountain, I began to get nervous as we began to lose power. The higher we climbed the thinner the air got, and the less power our vehicle had. We did finally make it to the top, but that was with the gas pedal floored, traveling around 15 mph, and a string of traffic following. I believe somebody suggested we pull over and let the people around, but I was afraid if I stopped, I wouldn’t get started back up. The second thing that left me know I was unprepared for the trip was the fact that I didn’t bring a jacket that was appropriate for the weather. I also began to feel lightheaded and nauseous due to the cold temperatures and thin air at the elevation. Needless to say, I could not wait to get down off of that mountain.

Many of us have set out on trips, adventures, or journeys without being fully prepared. Perhaps you left to go shopping and left your wallet at home, you participated in some athletic event without preparing your body properly, you entered into a relationship with somebody without considering the consequences. Is there anybody here who might have done at least one of these things? I know that I have and learned some mighty valuable lessons along the way.

When we enter into a relationship With Jesus Christ, we look forward to the journey; a journey filled with adventure and excitement, thrills and surprises, and good things. Yet when we read in scripture passages like todays; we have to wonder, “What did I get myself into?” Today we look into the passage found in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13. In our passage we have to wonder, “what in the world is going on here?” “Is this for real?” and “What am I to take away from this passage?” Turn with me in your bibles to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3:6-13, and stand with me as we share in the reading of God’s Word.

*(6)Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. (7)For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, (8)and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. (9)This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. (10)For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. (11)For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. (12)Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. (13)Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 NRSV)*

As we look at this passage, we need to understand a few things first. In Thessalonica, beneath the surface of the routine of daily life, a fierce struggle is being waged among invisible spiritual powers; a struggle with all that is evil, whose intent is to pull us away from God. For the believers in that time, they were facing adversity from every angle.

Some people in the Thessalonian church were teaching false ideas. One such teaching was that because Christ would return any day, people should set aside their responsibilities, quit work, do no future planning, and just wait for the Lord. But their lack of activity only led them into sin. They became a burden to the church which was supporting them, they wasted time that could have been used for helping others, and they became meddlers. These church members may have thought that they were being more spiritual, but Paul tells them to be responsible and get back to work.

Paul explained that when he and his companions were in Thessalonica, they worked hard, buying what they needed rather than becoming a burden to others. The rule they followed was, "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat." Please note there is a time to work and then there is a time to relax. Relaxation and recreation provide a necessary and much needed balance to our lives; but when it is time to work, We Christians should jump right in. Instead of waiting to be asked, we should ask what can I do to help. We should make the most of our talent and time, doing all we can to provide for ourselves and our dependents. Rest when you should be resting, but work when you should be working. An idle person who doesn't work ends up filling their time with less than helpful activities, they are susceptible to the spiritual struggles facing the Thessalonians.

We will all face obstacles and struggles in our spiritual walk, and one thing we can take away from today’s passage is that we need to be prepared. Prepared for the work that will need to be done. Prepared for the tasks that we are called to do, and prepared for the obstacles lying in our path, obstacles striving to prevent us from succeeding. Being ready for Christ means obeying him in every area of life. We know that Christ is coming again someday, we must live in such a way that our faith and our daily activities will please him when he arrives and bring glory to him until that time. I told you about my experience on Pike’s peak being unprepared, but can you imagine what it would have been like on Mount Everest.

Pike’s Peak stands at 14000 ft above sea level; Mount Everest is more than double that. Mount Everest is one of the most fascinating places on earth. It’s the highest mountain in the world, the summit stands at 29,029 feet above sea level. It is one of the roughest natural environments in the world. For decades, the mountain has called out to climbers all over the world. expert mountaineers and novice thrill-seekers alike; everyone who goes to the mountain knows full well the risks of climbing; severe frigid temperatures, thin air, sudden snow storms, and avalanches.

Because of the mountain’s altitude, climbers spend months in preparation and training. At the base of the mountain, their bodies must acclimate to function at high altitudes. The difference in air pressure up on the mountain is drastic, a body that isn’t well adjusted, can cause loss of consciousness, sickness, or even death. And yet, knowing full well the risks of Everest, climbers remain committed, making desperate, physically exhausting, nearly life-ending bids to reach the mountain’s summit.

A recent report said only 1 of 3 people attempting to climb to the peak, make it down again. The mountain’s frigid temperatures, gusting winds, imposing rock walls, and narrow traverses make it one of the most dangerous places on the planet and it is one of the least conducive to a human presence. To climb to the top and back down again requires training, endurance, and strength of mind sufficient for overcoming the worst things our world can throw at us. Now you may be thinking this is all interesting but what does this have to do with the Thessalonians, and what does this have to do with me?

When it comes to following God, I wonder if we truly prepare ourselves for what lies ahead; if we prepare ourselves for the ups and downs, the narrow traverses; if we prepare ourselves for the sheer rock walls we face; if we prepare ourselves for our journey into the kingdom of God; because our journey isn’t always going to be easy. Jesus tells his disciples frequently throughout the gospel that before the end comes to pass, before the summit is able to be reached, God’s people will be thrown into prison, Christ followers will be tried by juries, and Those who are identified with Jesus will be brought before tribunals.

Consider the stark words of Luke 21:10-12: “*Then he said to them:* *‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.”* Followers of Jesus will face persecution and betrayal; they will be betrayed by loved ones; they will be mocked and despised for their loyalty to Jesus. But for all that, for all the obstacles that urge us to retreat back down the mountain, those who endure to the end will gain their soul. Even though the journey demands everything we have and everything we are, when we follow him, submit to his will by loving our neighbor as ourselves, we gain an intimacy with God which survives long after this world spins off into primitive nothingness.

But we live in America, that will never happen here, right? I hate to say this, but I do not consider America a Christian country any longer. This is just my opinion, and you are free to disagree, but take a look at what's going on in our country. Corruption in government, corruption is not something to be claimed by Christianity. Discrimination in the streets, yes, we have always had to deal with discrimination. But now the church is the one being discriminated against. If you do not agree with the political agenda of any one party, You are ostracized, pushed away, and told that your way of thinking is wrong. We live in a world where culture determines what is right and wrong, And the norms and morals of the Christian community are slowly being pushed away. In passages like this, Jesus’ words aren’t particularly warm and fuzzy. They don’t make you want to stand up and jump for joy at being Christ’s follower. They’re challenging: earthquakes, disasters, war. It’s like the air is getting thin; and it is getting hard to breathe, air like I experienced on pike’s Peak, even more like you would find on Everest; Air that feels too thin to breathe.

Loyalty to Christ endures hardships. It recognizes that the journey is long and winding, and that, despite the high cost, God promises everlasting rest in the Savior’s arms for those who finish this journey. Along the way, it’s important for us to prepare our hearts; prepare our hearts for the reign of God, and prepare ourselves for the pains that will come with it. We must be diligent and hard-working as we make our way along the mountain pass; we must allow God’s spirit to saturate ours with His Word and with his holiness, so that when the time comes, and the air we breathe is thin, and our minds and bodies are put to the test, we might endure the obstacles and complete our mission. 2 Thessalonians seems to echo this sentiment. It reminds us that we’ve got a job to do, and if we’re not willing to put one foot in front of the other for the sake of the gospel. If we are not willing to step out n faith and do the tasks we are called to; to climb toward the summit regardless of where the path leads along the way, then perhaps we’ve more to do to prepare him room in our hearts.

The cross of Christ demands our whole self. Paul instructs his followers to keep alert and to overcome idleness.  He tells us to guard against abusing the generosity and hospitality of others. His words of instruction are strict. If you’re unwilling to work for it, then you shouldn’t expect to reap the benefits. If you’re not willing to climb, don’t expect to make it to the summit. If you go idle along the route, don’t expect to make it to the top. Everyone must pitch in and work for the good of God's kingdom. To reach the summit, the team must pull together.

Now, just to be clear, this passage is not an indictment against the weak. When our neighbor is in trouble, we must serve him, just as Christ has done for each one of us. But Paul also tells us that we’re not to get run over by those who sense our willingness to serve and who would abuse it. We must not sit idle with those who do, especially when the weather is furious. We must keep moving together; this is where our focus should be as the body of Christ, pressing toward the summit. A faith that endures prepares itself through hardship.

With respect to God’s coming kingdom, instead of worrying about when Christ will return; and what events will take place, instead of trying to decipher the “signs of the times.” Scripture teaches us simply to live as if the end has already begun; to actively wait for God’s plan to finally unfold by doing the work we are called to do and refusing to sit idle. We must work and serve together. We must find ways to contribute to and build up the body, as Paul instructs the Thessalonian church. As Christians, this should be our first response when disasters ravage homes and villages, when nation rises up against nation, when homelessness and joblessness and poverty start to devour the children of God across the world and in our cities, and when tyrants abuse power. Rather than seeing these as indicators of where history is headed Rather than worrying about when it will finally arrive; God calls us to recognize the plight of the suffering; serving them however we can.

However, your main defense is prayer. Prayer that God will protect you from the evil one and his attacks. Prayer that God will strengthen you, study scripture to recognize Satan's style and tactics; memorize Scripture so it will be a source of help no matter where you are; associate with those who speak the truth; and put into practice what you are taught by sound spiritual leaders.

We have all heard of prosperity theology; The idea that we ask Jesus into our heart and he’ll make us whole, and everything in our life will start to improve. If you pray hard enough, God will hear you and honor you with material blessings and prosperity.” But this logic flies out the window with the life of our Lord, as the apostle Paul sends this advice to the Thessalonians. If his were a sales pitch to people looking for a religion that fit conveniently into their lives, it would fail miserably.

Paul reminds us that trusting in God doesn’t lead to wealth or status; the kingdom of God is counterintuitive to conventional wisdom. True faith requires endurance. The invitation to Christian living is an invitation to come and die to self so that we might discover a new and better life in Christ, as we live and sacrifice together and press on toward the summit. Following Christ isn’t easy. It doesn’t promise prosperity or worldly glory, but for those who are transformed by the love of Jesus Christ to love and serve others, it gains us our soul and the promise of eternal relationship with God. As the people of God journey together, may Christ be our guide, who leads the way as we traverse treacherous pathways between now and kingdom come.