**November 5, 2023 1 Thessalonians 13-20**

***Eternal Investments***

**Scripture:**

*(13)We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. (14)For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, (15)who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone (16)by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last. (17)As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you--in person, not in heart--we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. (18)For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again--but Satan blocked our way. (19)For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? (20)Yes, you are our glory and joy!*

**Notes:**

1. Paul knew a ***good*** deal,
   1. Paul’s task was to deliver a good ***eternal*** investment.
2. The 1st investment is ***salvation***.
   1. ***Start*** somewhere.
   2. Because of Christ’s action, we can be ***forgiven***.
   3. Take a leap of ***faith***.
   4. The best eternal investment is to be **saved**.
3. The 2nd investment is ***suffering***.
   1. ***Paul*** suffered.
   2. ***We*** will suffer too.
   3. Suffering is not ***wasted***.
   4. Suffering must have a ***purpose***.
4. Investment #3 is ***substance***.
   1. Paul had invested in ***people***.
   2. People’s ***faith*** and ***love*** for Jesus was Paul’s crown.
   3. ***Hope*** is rewarded.
   4. True hope - ***substance*** - will ALWAYS be rewarded.
5. We all are ***investing*** in something.
   1. The Word of God will ***lead*** you to it.
   2. ***Follow*** the Lord Jesus Christ.
   3. Get involved with ***fellowship***, ***discipleship***, and ***evangelism***.

**Script:**

I have spent the last few weeks considering the investments I have made in my life. I have invested a portion of my income into a retirement account, so when I decide to retire from my occupation, my means of making money, I will have enough saved up to comfortably live out my days. I have invested in my family, sharing what I have and the knowledge I have acquired over the years with my parents, my wife, my children, and many other members of my family in order to assist them in maintaining their level of satisfaction in this life. I have invested in this church, who had invested in me many years ago when I was but a child. Now not everything I have invested over the years has been monetary; some has been knowledge, some has been in council, and then there were those who I invested with friendship. Some investments were in time, others in knowledge, and yet others on monetary items. Nevertheless, I have invested a lot.

What have you invested your life’s work into? What type of returns will you see in these investments, and what do you hope to receive from them? You see, investments are tricky, sometimes they bring a return very quickly and then there are times when we may never receive a return, but it will be seen by those who survive us.

And this brings me to the question I have to ask you today. What does it take to make a good investment? A conservative advisor may say get started early, invest steadily, work hard at it, and avoid chasing rabbits (get rich quick schemes). Aggressive advisors will tell you that when the market is in decline, buy up what you can; and when the market is peaking, sell off; they will tell you buy low, sell high; that is how you maximize your profits and returns. Today in our sermon passage we get a glimpse of Paul’s philosophy of investments and returns. Join me in the reading of our sermon passage today found in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

*(13)We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. (14)For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, (15)who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone (16)by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last. (17)As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you--in person, not in heart--we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. (18)For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again--but Satan blocked our way. (19)For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? (20)Yes, you are our glory and joy! 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 NRSV*

Paul knew a good deal, and he knew his task was to deliver a good eternal investment to the community at Thessalonica. In our passage Paul reminds them of three areas of eternal investments that were effectively working in their lives.

The 1st investment is salvation. *“(13)We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.”* You must start somewhere. Do you remember where you were when you started on this walk with Jesus? Paul had come to Thessalonica and other parts of the region, into Europe, to deliver the gospel message of Jesus. He shared with those he encountered the good news; Jesus had come and died for our sins. Jesus wasn’t the God of the dead; but he had risen from the dead and indeed is alive now. Jesus had conquered death and the grave.

And now because of Christ’s action, we can be forgiven. We too can be adopted into the family of God and live eternally with him. These people in Thessalonica had heard the message and they received it; they received salvation. To receive implies that you have “taken up with the hand.” If you want to receive the salvation God offers, you simply take the gift as it is offered. How do you do such a thing; surely something so valuable must be heavily guarded? How do you do that?

You do it when you take a Leap of Faith. John writes in his Gospel, *“(16)For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (17)"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (18)Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. John 3:16-18 NRSV”* To take a leap of faith is to hear the gospel message and believe. Jesus himself says that “*everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life*”

We need to believe and respond by asking for forgiveness and submit to his will. Those who believe are those who have seen the difference between good and evil in their hearts. They have also recognized that although they would rather choose good in all circumstances, there are times they chose to do wrong. That is the sinful nature. The leap of faith, is taking Jesus at His word; that, confessing this sin, and asking Christ to forgive and save, He will! And He does.

Once this is started , there is no stopping. Once you turn your eyes to the Lord, once you ask for forgiveness, you must keep moving in that direction. When God makes a promise, He keeps it. The Thessalonian believers had accepted what Paul had preached as the Word of God. They had received it by faith, confessing their sin, and been saved. Paul now wrote to them and said, "That word is still working for you."

Paul knew, and so did the church, of changed lives. Christ was effectively changing lives in that fellowship, and good things were being done because of the change. How does He do that in my life and yours? I’m not certain, but He does. Jesus knows just what is needed in my life, and by His word, and the power of the Holy Spirit, He is changing me, and circumstances to make me what I really need to be.

I heard a story years ago about a small factory that had to shut-down because one of the vital pieces of machinery broke. The company mechanic couldn’t get it running, so they called an expert. The man looked over the machine for a few minutes and took a hammer and tapped it, and it began running as it should. He submitted a bill for $1,500, and the owner hit the roof. "Five minutes work for that much?" he bellowed. He demanded an itemized bill, which he got; it read:

FOR TAPPING MACHINE --------------$ 10.

FOR KNOWING WHERE TO TAP --------- 1,490.

When it comes to the "human machine" Jesus knows what needs to be tapped. The best eternal investment you could make today (if you haven’t already) is to be saved, give your life to Christ. You should start investing eternally somewhere. Start by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, receiving His free offer of salvation.

The 2nd investment is suffering. “*(14)For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, (15)who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone (16)by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last. (17)As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you--in person, not in heart--we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. (18)For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again--but Satan blocked our way. (14-18)”*

Paul suffered. Perhaps the least popular concept in Christianity is that suffering is actually a part of God’s plan. Suffering is not God’s plan; suffering is the result of sin. Those who preach a wealth and health kind of gospel skip over the reality that suffering is part of life, and it isn’t always God’s will that we be spared. If that were so, I know of twelve early followers of Jesus that must’ve REALLY messed up, because they all were persecuted and 11 of them paid the ultimate price with a violent martyrdom.

We will suffer too! A Christian’s commitment will inevitably lead to suffering of some sort. Paul wanted so much to go back to visit and minister to the folks at Thessalonica. But Satan managed to set up roadblocks at every turn. It was agony to Paul to "fail" at this point, but he saw what we must see about the eternal investment of suffering....

Suffering is not wasted! When we suffer, we do not suffer for nothing. Since suffering is a reality, and it is sometimes a part of God’s plan for your life and mine, then it must also have a purpose. When Christ died for us, He suffered on the cross. It was an atoning for our sin. He suffered for us. That is called vicarious suffering. Jesus felt the pain, we received the gain.

In some way we can be that for others. G. Campbell Morgan was a pastor in London who went through a painful illness, and became quite depressed. He went to see his friend, Joseph Parker at the famous "City Temple" to get some advice. Parker told him, “Never mind the suffering son, your people will get the benefit.” What he meant was that God will turn the suffering into salvation somewhere along the line.

* Mothers suffer vicariously in childbirth. She hurts, a child lives.
* Soldiers suffer for their countries. They die, we live.
* When you give your time and effort, and very soul to serve, someone will benefit.

There’s no such thing as a crop failure in God’s vineyard. Even a cup of cold water, given in Jesus’s name will be seen. God can use our suffering to get our attention or the attention of others. God can use our suffering to teach us many things; if nothing more than we can trust in Him. So we can see our eternal investments are in Salvation, Suffering, and …

Investment #3 is substance! “*(19)For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? (20)Yes, you are our glory and joy!*” I have heard many people say that when we hope and wish for things, we do not show much faith. I disagree. A definition of hope states, “*Hope is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's life or the world at large*” from that definition I can see what those people mean. However, here is a much more realistic definition of hope. “*Hope is a feeling of expectation, a desire or wish for a certain thing to happen.*” But take that a little further, “*Hope is an expectation with certainty that God will do what he has said.*”

Paul had invested his life, his strength, and his all in people. Paul was no slick-talking, razor-cut evangelist in a white suit, signing people up on his mailing list. He pointed to the fact that it was THEIR FAITH, their love for Jesus that was his crown. All the eternal returns and reward Paul expected or wanted was to see those who he had seen converted under his ministry learn to throw their all into serving Jesus too. This was substance. This was investing for real! This was laying-up treasures in heaven.

Hope is rewarded. Indeed, you are our glory and joy. You can invest in a lot of things - a job, a home, and a bank. You can also invest in what God did - people. How much of your life do you have investing in the lives of other people?

* If you invest in earthly things, earthly rewards follow.
* If you are heavily-heaven minded, and invest in souls that will live forever,
* the crown of glory is laid up yonder.

True hope - substance - will ALWAYS be rewarded in kind.

In 1626, Peter Minuit, the director-general of Dutch West India Company’s settlement in North America, made what he thought was a pretty good deal. He bought Manhattan Island from the Indians for $24. Unfortunately, headquarters didn’t agree with him. They fined him that amount for being "extravagant" with company money. Today you couldn’t buy a square inch of Manhattan for that amount.

What kind of choices are you making? The words, works, wisdom of men will lead you away from eternal investments. The Word of God will lead you to it!

Who here, today, is willing to make eternal investments? You begin by following the Lord Jesus Christ?

Who is willing to begin? We only need to answer Yes Lord, Yes.