

There is a famous quotation, attributed to Plato and also to a couple of the puritan writers.

No one really knows who said it. It is good advice, and true.

“Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”

I have found in my 34 years of various kinds of ministry, that this is absolutely the case.

And, you never really know all that is going on and the struggles that people are facing.

Life is hard and everyone alive is in it. Why?

The atheistic Darwinist would say that it is all just the struggle for survival of the species.

But that fails to even get at the question.

Why are we here? Why is life such a battle? Why do we always feel as if things ought to be better?

When I was 20, I was on a summer mission project with Campus Crusade to Wildwood, New Jersey.

One evening we had gone out to share the gospel with people in town, door to door.

It was myself and another young lady about my age.

A woman had invited us into her home because she was interested in whatever we had to say.

She had some questions about God, and we shared with her from the Four Spiritual Laws.

The entire time her husband was sitting in the corner of the room, in the shadows, listening.

I could not see his face, but I could tell he was listening.

As we got to the end of the gospel tract, I asked the woman if she would like to ask the Lord into her life.

She seemed excited to do so and we prayed together, the three of us.

As we were about to get up and leave, I felt as though I needed to say something to the man in the corner.

I said, “Sir, would you like to ask Christ into your life?”

His answer came from the shadows, “No. If I did then Satan would attack me.”

I was 20 years old. I had never heard anything like that as a reason to not trust Jesus.

I didn't know what to say and so I said nothing. The two of us just left.

But that man's answer bothered me. I sort of thought he had a point though not a particularly good one.

About a year later I picked up a book by Donald Grey Barnhouse called The Invisible War.

It is a fantastic book.

Dr. Barnhouse lays out the Bible's teaching about a war that has been going on from the beginning of time.

God created a world designed to be good and it was all very good.

This is where we get the feeling that things ought to be better. It is true. They ought to be.

But, right after that good beginning, one of God's great angels, Lucifer, rebelled.

In his pride he thought he wanted to have the worship and lordship that was allowed for God alone.

God judged him and cast him down to earth where he has sought to steal, kill, and destroy.

One of the first things he did was to tempt Adam and Eve into sin and rebellion with himself.

Lucifer, now called Satan, went to war against God and all of God's designs and is still doing so.

He knows that his days are numbered. He is going to lose. He can read the end of the book.

But Satan is a liar. Maybe he even believes his own lies. He is wrecking as much as he can.

When Jesus was born, he tried to kill him. But he failed. (Revelation 12)

The ministry of Jesus was a major setback for him as Jesus rescued many from his deceptions.

Then Jesus was crucified. He died for our sins. Maybe Satan thought he had won a major victory.

But no. Jesus rose from the dead and all of Satan's schemes came crashing down.

Now, he is angrier and more destructive than ever, seeking to ruin those who follow Jesus.

Satan is attacking Christians and has been for 2,000 years.

But, to not believe in Christ is no defense.

In fact, that only means that you are a captive to the evil one and don't even know it.

Of course he would not attack those he has in his grip as his captive, headed for destruction.

No, he wants those people to remain undisturbed in their blind ignorance.

But if you follow Jesus you will receive the full fury of Satan's assault. He hates you.

I do not say this to make you fearful or to discourage you. I say it because it is the truth.

And do not be fearful. Be courageous!

Why? The Bible says that you are in a war, an invisible war, that began over 6,000 years ago.

But take heart, the Lord is with you. And He will win the victory.

You are in a war and the Lord is on your side.

The Bible describes for us in various places the nature of the war that we are in.

We must do battle against Satan himself and his demons who seek to destroy us.

We must war against the flesh and the temptations to which our flesh is vulnerable.

And the world system is constantly seeking to subvert us and conform us to its mold.

So, we are under attack from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

This reality informs the passage we are in this morning.

We have already seen in 2 Thessalonians that those who follow Jesus will be under attack.

We will have to face suffering in this world and persecution.

We are going to have to cling to the truth amidst false teaching and false teachers.

So, we need to stand firm in the truth and keep trusting and obeying the Lord until He comes.

But we find in this text that the truth of the gospel to which we hold is not a static thing.

In Paul's prayer request to these believers we learn that the Word of the Lord is on the move.

I. The Word of the Lord will run ahead of you. 3:1-2

The first verse of chapter is one of the most remarkable teachings about the Bible in the whole Bible.

But, at first you might not notice. A little Greek lesson is in order. But it is not hard.

NAS, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will **spread rapidly** and be glorified,"

ESV, "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may **speed ahead** and be honored,"

NIV, "As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may **spread rapidly** and be honored,"

KJV, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may **have free course**, and be glorified,"

Why the differences?

It is because all the translations are trying to translate a single Greek word.

Sadly, if each version would simply apply a literal translation we would be better served.

The Greek word is "trecho." Guess what it means. You probably can.

It means "run." Usually it means a long run. This is the root of our English words "trek, trekking."

Everywhere else in the Bible it is translated "run." Why not here?

You should just write "run" in your Bibles next to the words "speed ahead" or "spread rapidly."

It is a present active verb which means continuous action that it is doing.

Paul is asking that they pray that the Word of the Lord will run and be glorified.

The picture is vivid and instructive. The Word of God has legs and is running around ahead of us.

Hebrews 4:12-13 The Word of God is a living thing, going places, doing its work.

Paul is saying, 'Pray that it will run.' Pray that it gets loose. No one can stop it.

And, where it goes it is honored and glorified. People are amazed, or they are irrationally angered.

And the Word of God reveals that we are in a war. God's Word draws enemy fire.

But do not be fearful. The Word of God is our defense and our offense. **Ephesians 6:10-17**

The opponent: evil men

We need to be delivered from wicked and evil men... those who persecute Christians and the false teachers.

And they abound, more now than in a long time in this part of the world.

We live in a society that increasingly wants to shove the Word of God out of every part of life.

Our society prefers a different gospel, a nicer, tamer, more controllable gospel.

Rob Dreher, The Benedict Option, p. 10

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism... it is a deadly deception. This is the assault of the world.

That God exists for me to have a better business, better marriage, better kids, a better life now...

This world demands that you believe this. It will try to force you to believe it.

The Word of the Lord attacks this belief and others that set themselves up against the Lord and His Messiah.

But those who believe this and teach this will sometimes fight to the death against what God really says.

They will fight you! They will call you judgmental. They will try to make you be quiet.

They will try to force you to violate what God says. Who knows, they may try to throw you in prison.

II. The faithful Lord will strengthen you. 3:3

Yes, if you are a Christian, evil men will attack you. Yes, if you are a Christian, Satan will attack you. But you have an amazing advantage, a blessing, a defense that is better than not being attacked at all. The Lord is on your side.

Hebrews 13:5-6

Acts 17:6 In Thessalonica Paul and Silas came preaching the Gospel. People were transformed.

All they could do to these Christians was to beat them. But that only made the message more powerful.

The Lord gave them strength.

In Matthew 16 we learn about the church that “the gates of hell will not stand against it.”

Satan in this world is losing the battle. You can be sure that he’s going to fight tooth and nail as he’s losing.

But he is losing, and the Lord is on your side... or, rather, you are on His. He will strengthen you.

Proverbs 18:10, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.”

He is our fortress and the guard at our gates.

He will keep us safe from our opponent in this ancient invisible war.

The opponent: the evil one

1 Peter 5:6-11 The Lord will “perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

Right in the face of Satan’s attacks. And the Lord is able to make you stand.

Just like He made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stand.

Just like He made Stephen stand.

Like He made Paul and Peter and all the apostles stand.

1 Peter 3:14-15 Satan will do His worst. Do not fear. Be a witness.

Do you know what the Greek word is for witness? *Marturos*. It is where we get our word “martyr.”

Because in the first centuries Christian witnesses often died. But fear not.

Matthew 10:26-28 Fear the Lord alone. He will honor those who honor Him.

III. The Lord who loves you will help you to obey Him. 3:4-5

How is it that Paul can be so confident about them? How does he know that they will persevere?

Paul knows the Lord who saves them and will complete the work He began in them.

Last week I preached to you the biblical doctrine of the sovereignty of God and the perseverance of the saints.

You may not have recognized it as such, but it is what Augustine taught 1,600 years ago.

It is what John Calvin taught 500 years ago.

They taught this because this is what Jesus taught and what He taught His disciples to teach.

John 10:14-16 “I know My own” Before you were ever born.

John 10:27-28 Why will they never perish? They hear the Shepherd’s voice. They follow Him.

1 Peter 1:1-2 “chosen... to obey Jesus Christ...”

The Lord loves you. He will help you and enable you to follow Him and obey.

Of course, as we learned last week, we cannot sit around and do nothing thinking that He works without us.

Remember **Philippians 2:12-13** It is all God, and it is all us with God’s help.

Are you following Jesus? You are doing and will do what God commands.

And the Lord directs our hearts to His love and steadfastness of Christ.

Because Christ stood strong, we can in Him stand strong as well.

And it is going to be a battle because our flesh, and the mind set on the flesh does not want to obey the Lord.

Opponent: our own flesh

We need our heart to be directed because on our own we will go astray.

People sometimes ask me, “How can I know that I will not fall away? How will I not stray from the Lord?”

I answer, “The person who takes the Lord’s warnings seriously and clings to Him vigorously will not fall.”

Yes, the flesh is vulnerable, and we are weak. But the Lord is strong.

He gives you brothers and sisters to help you. Listen to them. Get with them.

He gives you His Word, the very words that God speaks. Listen to them. Make them a part of you.

He gives you a ready line of communication, prayer. Ask Him for help when you need it.

You are not alone in this battle. Do not live like you’re alone.