

# Explore the Bible: March 20

*Confronted • I Thessalonians 2:13-20*

*By Cyndi Grace*



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One would have had to have been under a rock the last year to have missed seeing Christians being persecuted throughout the world. There have been beheadings in the Middle East, imprisonments in China, and slaughter in Africa of those who are believers in Christ.

However, we also see that Christianity is growing by leaps and bounds in these very same countries. That doesn't make sense, does it? It goes against everything, but that is the way God seems to work. History shows that every time the church has undergone severe persecution, it has grown starting at the very beginning.

Recently, we have heard about Afghani believers who were in the midst of a worship service when soldiers came to kill them. This past week, we received communication from the Christians in Ukraine huddled in prayer as bombs were exploding all around them.

What causes this kind of faithfulness in a person? I believe we see an answer in I Thessalonians 2:13b: "...you welcomed it [The Gospel] not as a human message, but as it truly is, the Word of God, which also works effectively in you who believe" (CSB).

There it is! They believed deeply in their hearts that what they had heard was the truth and they staked their lives on it. That belief caused them to carry on, no matter what their circumstances were or who was causing them. Most of their opposition was from people with whom they had previously shared their lives: friends and church members.

The Apostle Paul went on to affirm that they had suffered just as Jesus had, namely from the hands of their own people. They were truly imitating Christ (vs.14). Jesus Himself had warned that very thing would happen to those who followed Him:

*If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don't know the one who sent me (John 15:18-25 CSB).*

I wonder why our modern church seems to forget that passage. Somehow, I was brought up thinking if I did everything right, life would be wonderful. We often tell people to come to Jesus and things will be better. It is almost a testimony that, "Jesus died so we could have a good day."

Nothing could be farther from the truth. We have an enemy who wants nothing more than to destroy us. Jesus warned us of this. In another passage He stated, *I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world (John 16:33 CSB).*

This peace wasn't a lack of conflict – far from it. It was the presence of Jesus in the form of the Holy Spirit in us. The Thessalonian church comprehended those words and stood strong

against the enemy's attacks which enraged the opposition even more. Because of this, the Gospel spread.

Are we willing to stand when things get tough, and to identify with Christ in His sufferings? It is an important question to ask amid the conflict that is surrounding us in this day of impending war.

Paul finishes his letter by once again telling the church how much he loves them, and expresses his wish to see them again. As far as we know, he never saw them in person again but his remembrance of them brought joy knowing that they were a strong voice for Jesus in the world.

Paul spent only three weeks in Thessalonica. Not much time, but the power of the Holy Spirit used those three weeks as the catalyst for a great spreading of the Gospel.

There will be times we think what we did was not important, but God can use us no matter where or how long. Perhaps that conversation in an airport encouraged the next great evangelist, or those words of encouragement to your pastor spurred him on in a time of doubt. No matter what, let God use you.

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