

Stopped by Satan !

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A study given at Thessaloniki in Greece, February 9th, 2007

by

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Text: 1 Th 2:17-18

INTRODUCTION

- (1) What a strange admission for an apostle to make -- *stopped by the devil!*
- (2) Perhaps it is not the apostle who is wrong but rather a fault in the popular understanding of what it actually does mean to walk by faith?
- (3) The real issue, when you find yourself in a situation like Paul's, is this -- what will you do about it if you find that Satan has "stopped" you, whether spiritually, financially, physically, in your life's goals, in prayer or Christian service, or in any other way?

SATAN STOPPED ME -- BUT HE CANNOT DISCOURAGE ME

- (1) Richard Nixon in his final words to his presidential staff made this inspiring comment, *"Always give your best. Never get discouraged. Never be petty. Always remember, others may hate you. Those who hate you don't win unless you hate them, and then you will destroy yourself."*
- (2) Is it possible to remain optimistic in the face of crushing opposition?
 - • Consider Paul, and how much cause he had to become dispirited — mark the graphic terms he uses in our text.

(3) It is not a nice picture! You may be experiencing the same pain, but like Paul, you should refuse to be discouraged.

- Note the dramatic contrast between his repeated complaint, *"I could no longer bear it"* (3:1,5), and the exultant joy and unquenchable confidence expressed in 3:9-11.

(4) Note too that Paul had taken himself to prayer, and the lesson is this: so long as you can pray you cannot be overthrown, you must emerge the victor!

SATAN STOPPED ME – BUT HE CANNOT DENY ME

(1) The story of the founding of the church in Thessalonica is dramatic (Ac 17:1-9).

(2) How was he prevented from going back to the church? How did Satan "stop" him?

- We don't know, although it was probably linked with the legal injunction laid upon Jason (who was a relative of Paul's, Ro 16:21), which obliged him to lodge a bond with the court and to keep the peace.

(3) Nevertheless, Paul *did* find a way to get back into the city, when he visited Macedonia on his Third Missionary Journey.

- What made him so persistent? Surely, that he had earlier received a word from God (Ac 16:9-10), and he refused to be denied its fulfilment.

(4) Note his pungent faith-confession, hidden in our text: *"My dear friends, you have been torn away from us for a short time!"*

SATAN STOPPED ME – BUT HE CANNOT DEPRIVE ME

(1) One word sums up the devil – **"THIEF"**.

- His thieving work underlies all the sorrow, hurt, loss, ruin, defeat, that continues to afflict human life, even that of Christians; he is the author of the pain that strikes at us all.

(2) We have all learned how sadly true those words are!

(3) But suddenly, just as despair begins to chill the soul, faith hears another voice. It cries: *Satan can rob you only on the surface!* The Thief carries off only life's pebbles! Your real treasure lies where no bandit can touch it, nor moth consume, nor rust corrupt!

(4) Notice how Paul followed the sad words "*Satan stopped me*" with a ringing exclamation of hope, joy, triumph, and a crown! (1 Th 2:19-20)

SATAN STOPPED ME – BUT HE CANNOT DEFEAT ME

(1) In the story of King Arthur and Camelot we are told that Arthur began timidly, skulking in his castle, trembling before his foes, just like many Christians.

- But then encouraged by Merlin, he waved his magic sword Excalibur, sallied forth, and won a kingdom!

(2) But we too have a magic sword, our own true Excalibur, a blade infinitely mightier than Arthur's mythical weapon (Ep 6:17).

- So march out and challenge the Foe; demand that he fall back; seize from him all that he has stolen; force every dark spirit to give way in Jesus' name; our Sovereign Lord says: "*You will overcome them all, whether they wish it or wish it not!*" (Lu 10:18-19).

(3) That is what Paul did, and he triumphed gloriously! (Ac 20:1-2)