



# More Expressions of Affection - Eager to be with Them

## 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

"More Expressions of Affection - Eager to be with them"

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

1. Desire to Return (verse 17)
2. Difficulty in Returning (verse 18)
3. Delight in the Thessalonians (verses 19-20)

It has been said, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." I understand this. When my wife and I were first engaged to be married, I was living in Illinois and she was living in California. During those long five months, we longed to be together, but through circumstances, were prohibited from being together. On one occasion, I did make a surprise trip out to California. However, most of the time, we had to settle for phone calls and letters. Yet, during this separation, our hearts grew fonder for each other as we longed to be together.

In our text this evening, we find Paul experiencing similar feelings. He is communicating to the Thessalonians of his genuine and fond affection for them, though they are separated by many miles. In this way, Paul is repeating some of the same themes that came about in chapter 2:7-12, where he defended his ministry by affirming how they demonstrated a fond affection for the Thessalonians (2:7-12). In these verses, Paul's defense then focused on the subjective facts of his presence among them (i.e. Paul's care and love for them). It is really this last point of Paul's that he is going to pick up in chapter 2:17 and following. He is going to focus on the subjective. Paul is going to talk about his feelings in this section. This will continue to be his theme through the end of chapter 3. Paul is going to communicate to the Thessalonians of his genuine and fond affection for the Thessalonians.

Because of this repetition, this section is much like 2:13-16, in that he takes up a familiar theme and expands upon it. You remember in the that section how Paul continued expressed his Thanksgiving to God for the Thessalonians. He said, "we constantly thank God" (2:13). They received the word, which performed its work in them (2:13). They became imitators of Paul by suffering like Paul had suffered (2:14). Much of this was brought up before by Paul in chapter 1. The theme of chapter 1 is Paul's thankfulness to God for God's work among the Thessalonians, "We give thanks to God always for all of you..." (1:2). The gospel came in word through the apostle's preaching (1:5). The gospel came in the power of God to change their lives (1:5,4). They became laborers for the gospel of Christ (1:3). They became imitators of Paul and of the Lord (1:6). Their faith became known in Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond (1:8). Similarly, in the section we will look at tonight (2:17-20), we will find Paul again going back to repeat some of the same themes that came about in the beginning of chapter 2.

In 2:7-12, Paul described himself as having the care and affection and love that a mother and a father have for her their own children. "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children" (2:7). "We had a fond affection for you" (2:8). "You know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children" (2:11). You remember when we talked about the accusations that came against Paul, many of them arose because he was only with the Thessalonians a very short time. He may have been with them for as little as 3 weeks. Perhaps a touch longer. But it wasn't a long time that Paul spent with these dear saints.

But Paul sought to communicate to them and remind them of how he genuinely loved them. Paul began his defense in chapter 2, by describing his care for them while he was with them. In our section we begin tonight, Paul will describe his love for them while he was away from them. As I entitled our last section, "More Expressions of Thanksgiving," so, I entitle this section, "More Expressions of Affection." In the 4 verses we will look at tonight, we will look at ... Paul's Eagerness to be with the Thessalonians (2:17-20).

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

17. But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while--in person, not in spirit--were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

18 For we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, more than once--and yet Satan thwarted us.

19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?

20 For you are our glory and joy.

Again, let me remind you that here Paul is going to seek to defend himself against the accusation that "he never really cared, that's why he hasn't come back." People were certainly attempting to discredit his ministry by saying that he had no intention of returning. Well, in this next section, Paul made it abundantly clear that he desired to be with the Thessalonians. Paul wanted them to make sure that they knew that they were neither forgotten nor abandoned.

1. Desire to Return (verse 17)

In this verse, Paul is going to describe his intense desire to be with the Thessalonians. If you take out all of the modifiers in this sentence, you come up with the simple sentence, "We were eager to see your face." It is said in various ways in various translations, yet, all with the same emphasis:

MKJV - "we were eager to see your face."  
NIV - "we made every effort to see you"  
KJV - "endeavored to see your face"  
NKJV - "endeavored to see your face"

This was how Paul expressed his affection toward them. Though he was away from them, he was "eager" to see them. This is the Greek word, *spoudazw* (*spoudazo*), which give the idea of diligent effort and zeal to achieve a goal. Paul uses it in 2 Timothy 2:15 - "Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth." Writing to Timothy (4:9, 20) - "Make every effort to come to me." Paul was eager to see them. He was making every effort to see them, because of his affection for them.

But if you notice around these words of Paul, that he added quite a few superlatives to describe his intense longing for them. It is as if Paul didn't merely say, "We were eager to see your face." Nor did he say, "We were VERY eager to see your face." But, Paul said, "We were VERY, VERY eager to see your face." Not only is the word, *spoudazw*(*spoudazo*), a clearly passionate word, but Paul adds two other phrases within this verse modify the extent to which he desired to see their face. The first is caught up in the phrase that Paul uses, "all the more." This word merely intensifies the verb. Makes it bigger.

The translations attempt to pick up on this intensity like this:

MKJV - "we were **much more** eager with much desire to see your face."  
NKJV - "we endeavored **more** eagerly to see your face with great desire."  
KJV - "we endeavored the **more abundantly** to see your face with great desire."  
NIV - "out of our intense longing we made **every** effort to see you."

The second phrase of intensification is translated, "with great or much desire" in almost all of your translations. This word is most often used of intense sexual passion and lust. To sum up what Paul is saying in the last part of this verse is that with great desire and passion (like an uncontrolled lust), we super-de-duperdy diligently were eager to see your face. Such expression of affection! Paul basically was saying that I really, really, really, really, wanted to see you. I was very, very diligent to try to see you.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate this truth is by asking you, "what do you greatly desire?" Children, what do you greatly desire? Your toys, your parents, your brothers and sisters? My son loves his Legos. My daughter loves her Dream Doll House. Perhaps you adults love your car, your computer, your family, or your social clubs.

Perhaps the words of Thomas Lye, a pastor in Oxford, will help. He was ejected from his church on August 24, in 1662, for refusing to conform to the church of England. In the last sermon he ever preached to his people in that congregation, before he was to be prohibited from preaching to them ever again, he spoke from his own heart's experience, when he said, "A pastor ought ... to bear a most tender, vehement, ardent, melting affection towards that flock or people that God has committed to their charge. ... Do not blame them if their hearts be almost broken, when they are to part with such people. ... It is true, it lies in the power of man to separate pastor and people, but not to separate their hearts." (Farewell Sermons, pp. 225,226).

I know the good that it is to you all to communicate my desire to be with you. I'm looking to move to Rockford. We elders are praying concerning the timing of this move.

We shall see further that Paul continued to express his desire to come to them.

2:18 - "We wanted to come to you."  
3:1 - "We could endure it no longer."  
3:5 - "We could endure it no longer."

#### a) The type of separation - orphanhood

In order to understand his desire to be with them, it is important for us to note how he viewed his separation from them. He viewed their separation from each other as something that was forced upon them. Neither he, nor the Thessalonians, much desired that they would be apart from each other. It was not, "Good-bye and good riddance." And you recall, in our study of Acts 17, how it was that Paul had been expelled from the city. You remember how the city was in an uproar. Paul was accused of upsetting the world and bringing that same sort of confusion to Thessalonica. The only way for peace to be established was for Paul to skip town. And so he did. He traveled to Berea and Athens finally established himself at Corinth, from which this letter was written.

But Paul doesn't merely say that he was separated from them. Paul didn't communicate that he was far from them. Nor did he say that he simply left them behind. Rather, Paul chooses a specific word in this case to describe not only the physical separation, but also the mental anguish that has come with it as well. Paul described it as being "bereft" of them. I looked up bereft in a dictionary and found it to mean, "deprived or robbed of the possession or use of something." The Greek word used here is *aporfanizw* (*aporphanizo*). This comes from two Greek words: *apo* (*apo*), which means "from" and *aporfanizw* (*orphanizo*), which means "orphaned." Literally, Paul said that he was

"orphaned from" the Thessalonians.

With the family illustrations of chapter 2:7,11, this is probably the best way to look at it: being orphaned. Paul considered himself as a mother and a father to the Thessalonians and considered his separation from them as that of a parent, who had lost his children. This word pictures the undesirable event of a child being removed from his or her parents. How would you feel if your parent were taken away by police -- never to be seen from again? Or, how would you feel if your parents died in a plane crash? Obviously, it would be a devastating experience. Likewise Paul said, "we are like children who have lost their parents."

But this word, *aporfanizw* (*orphanizo*) is more general than that and can be used to describe the loss of any friend or relation and including the bereavement of a parent, in which case, Paul used it here. I thought about bringing this home to you by causing you to think of your own children. What if they your own children kidnapped and they appeared on the milk carton of missing children? What if they died? We all know of the difficult time that one family in our church has experienced in losing their son when only a few days old. What if the state came and took your children away because of a wrongful accusation of child abuse? How would you feel? Obviously, you would be heart broken. Well, that is how Paul felt. It was a miserable situation for him. He was apart from them. He was in mental anguish. He wanted to return to them.

#### **b) The duration of the separation - a little time**

Paul describes the time in which he was apart from them as "a short while." Literally, he says that he was apart from them for "a time of an hour." I think what Paul was saying here is that even after the briefest of time after their forced separation from each other, Paul had a desire to go back to them.

You normally experience homesickness when you have been away from home for a long while. In the first few days, you can handle it, but when days stretch out to weeks and weeks stretch out to months, it is difficult. There is a couple in our congregation that have willingly separated themselves for 6-8 months. I am sure that it was more and more difficult for them as time went on. Right away, the pain of separation, though real, was probably not as intense as it would have been later. Paul describes his separation from the Thessalonians in order to communicate the intensity of his desire for them.

#### **c) The attitude within separation - as if he never left.**

The song says, "I left my heart, in San Francisco." So Paul could have easily sang, "I left my heart, in Thessalonica" For that is what he said, "we were bereft of you for a short time -- in person, not in spirit." Though physically he was in Corinth, spiritually he was in Thessalonica. That is the reason he could say, "We give thanks to God always for all of you." (1:2) - Because he has such an affection for the Thessalonians that they were constantly on his mind. Though out of sight, they were not out of mind.

He said this in several other epistles. "For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present" (1 Cor. 5:3). "For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ" (Col. 2:5).

A great point of application here is that a pastor needs to demonstrate his affection to the people. I remember sitting in a seminar of an 80 year old pastor, who was giving advice for young pastors. He told us to "love our people." This isn't so much a command as it is an example. I remember going to a church where the pastor was known for his strong admonitions in his preaching. Yet, as he dealt with his people, you could tell that he genuinely loved them. This man taught me that you can strongly admonish those who know that you genuinely love them. Here is my plan as a pastor. I want to convince you of my love for you all that when a rebuke comes from my mouth, there is no doubt as to my heart for you. I have been convicted of Paul's great example before the Thessalonians. I trust that God will continue the work in my heart for you all.

Another application we see here is that strengthening the church is a great priority. I find it interesting here, that the great apostle Paul, wasn't merely interested in going to new places to win more and more converts. He was interested in strengthening the converts he knew of at the expense of seeing more come to Christ. Picture this, when he was in Corinth, his ministry was going very well! We see that he settled down there for 18 months. There was certainly great ministry going on there. But look at what he was thinking of doing. He was thinking about leaving to go back to Thessalonica to strengthen them! There are times when you leave a profitable ministry for a greater need elsewhere.

Paul said that "[w]e weren't boasting other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you" (2 Cor. 10:15-16). In this case, Paul's further evangelistic opportunities were based upon the maturity of the church that he founded in Corinth. As one man said, "New Pauline missionary work in the future is tied directly to a prior development of faith in the existing Corinthian community, a community that in the apostle's mind was anything but firmly settled at this time."

In 2 Cor. 2:12-13 we have a similar situation: "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia." Paul had a great opportunity for ministry here in Troas - "a door was opened for him in the Lord." But he forsook it to chase down Titus.

You can see how often Paul went about "strengthening" the churches. In Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, Paul returned, "strengthening the souls of the disciples," (Acts 14:22). In Antioch Judas and Silas encouraged and strengthened the brethren (Acts 15:32). Paul traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches (Acts 15:41).

Verse 17 describes Paul's great desire to return to Thessalonica. We find in verse 18, that he tried to come, and yet, was prevented from coming.

## **2. Difficulty in Returning (verse 18)**

Verse 18 says, "For we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, more than once--and yet Satan thwarted us." Paul says "we wanted to come" - the "We" being Paul and Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1). And yet, Paul singles himself out (i.e. speaking for myself), I Paul, "more than once." Perhaps twice. Perhaps three time. This is an idiom, which could mean, "again and again."

Now, Paul isn't seeking to speak down to Silvanus and Timothy. He is simply emphasizing his point: "Again and again have I desired to come to you." His point was for emphasis, not for contrast. And yet, Paul said, "Satan thwarted us."

When Paul speaks about Satan here, he is referring to the Devil, himself, the serpent of old. He is referring to "the tempter" (3:5). He uses the word, "Satan" to refer to him. This word literally means, "the adversary." This passage is typical of the way that Satan is an adversary to the work of God -- Seeking to prevent it from happening. And it is no surprise that Satan thwarted Paul. It has been said, "When God is at work, Satan is surely alongside." We know that what Christ is building, Satan is committed to destroying. You remember that great statement of Jesus, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). Only a few verses later, Peter was rebuked for seeking to forbid Jesus from going to the cross. Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (try as he might through Peter). This was in many ways, the most pivotal point in the gospels (Matthew 16 and Mark 8 - the point where Jesus set his face to Jerusalem to die).

Satan was visible in many New Testament churches. Ananias sold a piece of property and kept back some of the price for himself. When he brought a portion of it and placed it at Peter's feet (probably saying it was what they received), Peter said to him, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3). Smyrna was warned, "Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:9-10). Pergamum was told, "You dwell where Satan's throne is" (Rev. 2:13). In Philadelphia, a "Synagogue of Satan" existed (Rev. 3:9).

When we look in the passage in 1 Thessalonians, we see that "Satan thwarted us." The picture Paul uses here is derived from military operations. The picture is of breaking up a road by destroying bridges or some such thing so as to make the road impossible to travel over. In other translations, it says, "Satan hindered us" (MKJV, NKJV, KJV) or "Satan stopped us" (NIV). The same metaphor is used in Gal. 5:7 - "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?" Somehow, Satan made the road back to Thessalonica impassible. Paul couldn't travel it.

Now, this is different than when he was forbidden by the Holy spirit to speak the word in Asia or when the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:6,7). This was Satan seeking to thwart Paul's plans. My question, "Paul, why didn't you just 'bind Satan' so that he could get to Thessalonica?" (Perhaps the answer is that TV hadn't taught him how to do this.)

Though Satan thwarted Paul, were God's plans hindered? No. God is sovereign over all of Satan's activities. God would triumph. If nothing else, the hindering of Satan only caused 1&2 Thessalonians to be written, which has certainly done more for the progress of Christ's kingdom on earth than any visit of Paul to Thessalonica ever could have done. Perhaps that is why Paul was imprisoned so often - so he could write the Scriptures. If John Bunyan hadn't been placed in prison, we would not have received one of the best loved Christian books of all time, "Pilgrim's Progress."

Commentators are divided on exactly how Paul was hindered.

1. Some say that this was an illness of Paul (Gal. 4) - a bodily illness. But this is entirely foreign to this passage.
2. Some say that Paul's thorn in the flesh hindered him. After all, the thorn was called, "a messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7). It is nice that Paul's thorn in the flesh is connected with Satan. But, even if we knew these to be the same thing, there is so much difficulty in understanding what Paul's thorn in the flesh actually was that we gain nothing by this interpretation.
3. Some say that this was Jason's pledge. One of the things that had surely hindered Paul was Jason's pledge that was made at this time. Perhaps Paul's presence back in Thessalonica would have spelled trouble for Jason and his household.

If anything, I think the last alternative to be the best. However, I side with J. B. Lightfoot, "It is idle to enquire what was the nature of this hindrance." But at any point, we need to understand that Satan is alive and well. "Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). We are called to "resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). We need to acknowledge that Satan is alive and well and is actively seeking to thwart God's plans. Our tendency is to pull back from this truth. We need to acknowledge that Satan exists and the he will try to thwart us. Notice that in 1 Thessalonians, it was Satan, himself, who thwarted them. It wasn't a force, nor circumstances, but it was Satan, himself.

Thomas Brooks, in his Precious Remedies against Satan's devices, "Satan being fallen from light to darkness, from happiness to misery, from heaven to hell, from an angel to a devil, is so full of malice and envy that he will leave no means unattempted, whereby he may make all others eternally miserable with himself." Remember, "our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

- Satan schemes. "We are not ignorant of Satan's schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11).
- Satan entices leaders. "And not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6, 7).
- Satan entices single people. "Some (widows) have already turned aside to follow Satan" (1 Tim. 5:15).
- Satan entices with sexual temptation. "Stop depriving one another ... lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:5).
- Satan went after Peter. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed

for you, that your may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31, 32).  
- Satan went after Job (Job 1)  
- Satan went after Paul (2 Cor. 12:7). And there is no reason that he might not go after you. He is smart. He will seek to destroy you in your weakness.

As Thomas Brooks says, "Whatever sin the heart of man is most prone to, that the devil will help forward. If David be proud of his people, Satan will provoke him to number them, that he may be yet prouder (2 Sam. 24). ... If Peter be slavishly fearful, Satan will put him upon rebuking and denying of Christ, to save his own skin (Matt. 16:22; 26:69-75). If Ahab's prophets be given to flatter, the devil will straightway become a lying spirit in the mouths of four hundred of them, and they shall flatter Ahab to his ruin (1 Kings 22). If Judas will be a traitor, Satan will quickly enter into his heart and make him sell his master for money, which some heathens would never have done (John 13:2). If Ananias will lie for advantage, Satan will fill his heart that he may lie, with a witness to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:3). Satan loves to sail with the wind, and to suit men's temptations to their conditions and inclinations. If they be in prosperity, he will tempt them to deny God (Prov. 30:9); if they be in adversity, he will tempt them to distrust God; if their knowledge be weak, he will tempt them to trust God; if their knowledge be weak, he will tempt them to have low thoughts of God; if their conscience be tender, he will tempt to scrupulosity; if large, to carnal security; if bold-spirited, he will tempt to presumption; if timorous, to desperation; if flexible, to inconstancy; if stiff, to impenitency."

### 3. Delight in the Thessalonians (verses 19-20)

"For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19-20).

Paul ends this section by furnishing a motive for the intense eagerness to visit them. He is telling them why he would like to return. He does this by asking a rhetorical question - a question that needs no response. He asks, "Who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not you ... Notice in verse 20, how he also says, "you are our glory and joy."

Paul uses 4 nouns to describe his delight in the Thessalonians. They were his (1) hope, (2) joy, (3) crown of exultation, and (4) glory. These are strange things to put forth as characteristics of people. It is strange, because they are such high titles. For instance, "hope" is not used like this in scripture anywhere else. Most often, this type of phraseology is to be attributed to Christ alone. For instance, in 1 Tim. 1:1, we read, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope." In Col. 1:27, we read, "Christ in you, the hope of glory". The same is true concerning the "crown of exultation"? We most often we see crown as a type of reward given at the return of Christ. Whether it be a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), a crown of life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10), a crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4). The same is true of glory. It is usually attributed to God alone.

So, how do you understand all of these statements? And this isn't the only time in which Paul used these statements. He told the Philippians, "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord." (4:1). I think that the key is in their overall impact. Paul is clearly demonstrating in these words such a high regard and thankfulness and joy which has been generated by these people. The strength of his feeling toward them ought to rightly discredit the false accusations against Paul's genuine concern for the Thessalonians. "Don't listen to the critics, who say that I don't care for you." I care for you. You are my hope, my joy, my crown, my glory. In effect, Paul is saying, "I rejoice in the future. You give me tremendous joy. I boast about you." Perhaps the best way to understand this is in light of 2 Th. 1:4, "We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure."

Paul is saying that the Thessalonians cause great joy to abound Silas, Timothy, and himself. We must quote 3 John 4 - "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." I can personally testify to this. This week, I met with a man, who was soooo open to the things of the Lord. After speaking with him for an hour, my heart was sooo overflowing with joy and gratitude to the Lord for allowing me to be the conduit to encourage this man. And I know the joy of seeing Christians walk in the truth.

I would like to close by quoting two of my favorite pastors of past generations, who expressed their genuine joy and glory in the people whom they served through letters they wrote letters to their congregations.

Charles Spurgeon (from Mentone), Feb. 7, wrote, "My Beloved Friends, After enjoying a few restful nights and quiet days, I feel myself coming round again, and my heart is full of praise and thanksgiving to our gracious God. Your prayers have been incessant, and have prevailed; and I am very grateful to you all. As long as I am able, it will be my joy to be of service to you; and my only grief has been that sickness has weakened my powers, and rendered me less able to discharge my happy duties among you."

Charles Spurgeon (from Mentone), Feb. 12, 1874, wrote, "Beloved Friends, By the time this letter is read to you, I shall, if the Lord will, be on my way back to you; and my prayer is that I may return 'in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.' Very greatly have I been cheered by hearing of your prayers for me, and still more by the news of the good and great work which the Lord is doing in your midst. It is glad tidings indeed." (Drummond, p. 460).

Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote to his church on March 6, 1839 (he came to them in November 1836), "Still I have had two years of great joy among you - unspeakable joy - in seeing souls added to the Church of such as shall be saved. I may never be honored to preach again, yet still to all eternity I shall praise God that He sent me to you: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19, 20). And should I lightly break up such a connection as this? Ah, no! My dear friends, I do not need all your affectionate letters to persuade me, that, if it were the Lord's will, my own vineyard is the happiest place in the world for me to be. Again and again other vineyards were offered to me, and I was asked to leave you; but I never for a moment listened to one of them, for ye were the seal of my ministry; and where could I be happier than where the Lord had blessed me, and was still blessing me?

"But God sent another message to me. He laid a heavy hand upon my body. I long struggled against it, but it was too much for me. For two months I have been an exile from you, and I have felt all the time like a widower, or like Jacob bereaved of his children. My constant prayer was, that I might be restored to you, and to the Lord's service. You prayed the same; and when it was not answered, I cried, "Wherefore contendest thou with me" That word was sent in answer: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction" (Prov. 3:11). God seems plainly to shut the door against my resuming to you at present. I am greatly better, yet still I am forbidden to preach. I am not even allowed to conduct the family devotions morning and evening; indeed, whenever I exert myself much in conversation, I soon feel the monitor within, warning me how frail I am. In these circumstances, the General Assembly's Committee on the Jews has this day resolved that your pastor, accompanied by Dr. Black of Aberdeen, and my beloved friend Andrew Bonar of Collace, should travel for the next six months, to make personal inquiry after the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ... Joy."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 7, 2001 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).