

Pray For Us

Call to Worship: Psalm 34:1-10

1st Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

Hymn #709- *I Will Sing the Wondrous Story*

Hymn #387- *I Love to Tell the Story*

Hymn (Supp)- *I Stand Amazed*

Introduction:

Having dealt with the main issue that he wanted to address in this letter, and having closed that out with a relevant benediction, making an appeal to God to comfort, sustain and advance the suffering Thessalonians, Paul now moves into the conclusion of his letter, where he will address a critical practical matter that sprouts out of the theological issue that he has just addressed, concerning the final coming of Christ. But first, he inserts a request, seeking to enlist the help of the Thessalonians in the progress of his own ministry. And in doing this, he affirms that while he does seek to teach and correct the Thessalonians, he is yet on an equal footing with them. Paul is as much of a grace taker as they are. And so, here he asks them to appeal to God on his behalf even as he does the same for them. "Finally brethren, pray for us..."

For this morning then, we will consider the specific ways, in which, Paul asks the Thessalonian brethren to pray for him (and his co-laborers in the Gospel ministry).

I. Pray for Us

Looking at our text, we find Paul bringing forth two specific types of prayer requests, both of which, we will now consider.

1) "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you..." There is no question that Paul was anointed with supernatural power, when he preached to the Thessalonians. On his first visit there, following his ministry in Philippi, he was only able to remain there for three weeks, before having to flee for his life because of a large mob of unbelieving Jews who sought his life. And yet, a church plant was erected in that short time. In the first four verses of Acts 17, we are given the following summary statement of how Paul had conducted himself during the short time he was in Thessalonica:

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas."

In this short time, the Lord had used Paul (and his companions) to start a work in pagan Thessalonica. And as we have seen in 1 Thessalonians, the church that developed there, in the midst of great and ongoing persecution, became a model church of faith, repentance, and especially love, to all the other churches. Word had spread far and wide, of the success that God had granted Paul, there in Thessalonica, and there was no doubt that this was a wonderful work of God. And He continued to grow and mature this persecuted church, such that in this, Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul could particularly commend them for their exceedingly growing faith, their great patience in their tribulations, and their abounding love toward one another (chapter 1:3-4).

All of this was evidence of God's pre-time election of these brethren, as His Word had run swiftly among them and was glorified in the fruit which it bore in them. The manifest power of God, which He exhibits and reveals in the proclamation of His Word, was clearly made known in the great and continuous, miraculous work, which had taken place and continued to take place in the church at Thessalonica. By every worldly sense, the opposition ought to have snuffed out the Thessalonian's candle, but even persecution is no match for the power of God, which actually thrives in persecution, magnifying the reality and power of His Word. "Thus saith the Lord," will always prevail against the wiles and attacks of demons and fallen men!

And so, Paul here requests prayer, from among those who have experienced, and who continue to experience, the power of God's Word, that that Word would continue to prevail; that it would run swiftly and be glorified through Paul (and his co-laborers) as they proclaim it throughout the gentile world, even as it had prevailed (and continues to prevail) with them. That is the substance of the Apostle's first prayer request.

2) And secondly then, Paul makes an additional request, which ties into the first. Indeed, the power of God unto salvation and sanctification is bound to His Word. But God has also ordained to use human vehicles to convey that Word to others. The Word will not proclaim itself, not because God couldn't do that through visions and such, but because His ordained means of disseminating His Word is through the vocal chords of men. And so, the rose of God's precious Word could only be seen, if the vase that carried it, remained in tact. This is why all satanic opposition is geared toward attacking the vessels, which if broken, would prevent the Word from being proclaimed.

And so, especially out of a fervent desire to preserve the life giving Word, allowing it free course in its proclamation, Paul also requests prayer that the opposition would be prevented from thwarting the gospel labors of Paul and his companions. Notice, he adds, "and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith" (vs. 2).

Wherever the gospel is faithfully preached, opposition of some sort will always be present. This is a given. However, God is more than able to advance His Son's kingdom, in spite of (and, in fact, by means of) opposition. Indeed, Jesus Himself has been given dominion and authority over all things in heaven and on earth, such that no opposition can ultimately contend with Him. That said, we are no match for the opposition, and unless God constantly intervenes, by His Spirit, the ministry of His servants will bear no fruit. Paul knew this all too well. Even as an apostle, he was limited by his own physical and spiritual limitations. His persecutors, especially being influenced and driven by spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, would prevail upon him and shut him down, apart from the Lord's intervention.

And so, Paul requests that the Thessalonians would also pray that he (and his co-laborers) would be delivered from "unreasonable and wicked men." Again, it is inevitable that they will exist wherever the gospel is preached, but the glorious, all sovereign King to whom they could appeal, is more than able to deliver His servants from out of the hands of their enemies.

Notice further that Paul adds a little clause, explaining why such wicked and unreasonable opposition exists. One might think that with such a glorious gospel of grace that exalts God and delivers men from out of their bondage to sin, all would respond with open arms or at the very least permit its proclamation. But, "not all have faith." Not all believe and can see

spiritual realities and all of their glory, though Paul proclaims them clearly and in the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. What seems so obvious in the Scriptures cannot be comprehended by fallen, spiritually dead sinners, unless God regenerates them, gives them life and opens their eyes to the truth. And so, Paul lays these prayer requests before the Thessalonian brethren, because not everyone shares the same faith, which God has given them. And those who have not faith are naturally repulsed by and opposed to the gospel of Christ. They are still in darkness, and therefore, they reject and rebel against the light, which exposes their sin and their desperate need of God's free grace in Christ for redemption.

And so, Paul's appeal for assisted prayer is geared in the direction of prospering his gospel labors, so that, what happened in Thessalonica, would happen everywhere else that the gospel is preached, and all of this, for the glory of Christ and the expansion of His kingdom, in the rescuing of lost souls from their present condemnation. And the Thessalonians could pray intelligently about these things because they have witnessed both, God's power in advancing the gospel speedily (among them), and the hostility, which the Apostles (and themselves) have faced from unreasonable and wicked men. In other words, their own experience in these regards would inevitably add a particular fervency to their prayers.

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through our main text, let us then conclude our time by considering a few closing thoughts and applications:

1) Recognize again that the success of the ministry of the Word is never determined by the giftedness, eloquence or ability of the preacher. It's always determined by the Holy Spirit. Why does even the great Apostle Paul, whose theological understanding was far superior to those who followed him (we seek to properly exegete his theology in our preaching), who had been anointed with miraculous gifts, and who had received visions (even entering the third heavens)...why does he plead with the Thessalonians to pray for him, such that the Word would "run swiftly and be glorified?" Because he knew that the ultimate success of the preached Word was in the hands of God and no one else. He knew that his best and clearest efforts would fall on deaf ears, if God did not soften the hearts of stone, found in Paul's audience. You can shoot

spitballs at steal girders as much as you like, but they will only bounce right off of the steal. But when God melts the steal, even the spitballs will sink in.

And so, all of this to say that, if the Apostle Paul, who is certainly theologically superior to us, needed prayer from his contemporaries, then you can be sure that we desperately need the prayers of God's people today. And so, I know that this is "a beating the dead horse" issue for me, but brethren, it must be reiterated, often. Please, pray for us. Pray that God would anoint the preaching of the Word here in this church. Pray that the Word of God would run swiftly; that it would quickly penetrate the hearts and souls of all who hear it, and that it would be glorified in the quickening and changing of sinners!

And pray that God would deliver us from the opposition, which would seek to hinder us from faithfully proclaiming the glory of Christ. Now, while that opposition might not, in the present, include great persecution from those on the outside, there is plenty of opposition to be found within, especially from within the confines of our own hearts. Pray that God would enable us to resist temptation, to resist a love of the world and material things, to turn our backs to idolatry and sexual sin of every kind, and to continually rescue us from our own natural proneness toward growing proud. Pray for us to avoid the many distractions that could easily wrest us from maintaining a Christ-centered focus in ministry. Pray for us!

2) Recognize your position as an intercessor in the church. If you are a Christian, it doesn't matter how eloquent you are. It doesn't matter how theologically deep you have traveled. It doesn't matter how much you have struggled and continue to struggle with remaining sins. You have an audience with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and your prayers count! They might not be lofty and long, but if they are sincere, then they will prevail with God, because they are always intermingled with the incense of Christ's offering. We are a kingdom of priests, brethren! We are all priests in Christ!

Notice, Paul doesn't say, "Well, I'll go to Mary or some Old Testament Saint to intercede with God." No, he employs the prayers of regular church members, recognizing that, in Christ, they have as much of a right and ability to appear before the throne as anyone else. If you are in Christ, you are an intercessor. Utilize that position wisely and to the full! And know that God always hears you, in Christ!

3) As you pray, and as you yourself take opportunities to proclaim the gospel to others, never be surprised by those who reject you, and never take it personal. Paul reminds us here that "not all have faith." And brethren, the reality is that faith itself is not something that man can conjure up on his own, anymore than a dead man can breathe or get up and walk. Faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-10). That is why Paul pleads with the Thessalonians to pray here. Only God can remove the blinders. Only God can raise the dead, cause the deaf to hear and make the lame walk. Faith must come from God!

And so, be confident in your gospel proclamation and in the gospel proclamation of others, not because any of us have the power to convince anyone of anything related to the gospel, but because God is able to use weak vessels like us, to move mountains. Let not the hardness of others drive you to despair or to become bitter toward them. Rather, let their hardness compel you to pray all the more, to the God who is in the business of melting stony hearts and replacing them with hearts of flesh! God can always do what we can't do, even when we have not seen desirable results for decades! And so, friends, don't give up on your families, your friends, your coworkers and your loved ones. But rather, keep praying for them, always remembering that God can do above and beyond all that you can ask or even think!

4) Let me close by asking you this morning, are you a Christian? Do you know the God, whom we are speaking about here this morning; this God, who bids His people to come and speak to Him through His Son Jesus Christ? If not, wouldn't you like to know and relate to your Creator? Friend, there is a purpose in all of this, but mankind, we, you, are naturally in rebellion against God. You are born with a sin nature because of the fall of your first parents, Adam and Eve. And this nature has separated you from God, and it drives you to live in a way which is not pleasing to God. It drives you to fall short of the glory of God; to live contrary to the very purpose for which you were created. And now, you are stuck in the cycle of this world, which has no interest in God, and which has created a whole new definition of life that is bound to the material things of this world, which do not last, and which are incapable of fulfilling the soul or keeping you from facing the certain death that is approaching.

But you see, God is yet building His kingdom. He is calling a people out of this world and into His grace through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ, who died on behalf of sinners.

And if you recognize your sinful and fallen condition, and call upon the Lord Jesus Christ to save and deliver you from the power and penalty of your sins, you too can be saved. You can be reconciled to the God, whom you have greatly offended (and continue to greatly offend), through His Son Jesus Christ. Repent, turn from your sins and come to Christ, right now, by faith, and you will be saved!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25