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II Thessalonians 3:1-5 "Some Words on Prayer"
January 24, 2021

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Thessalonians Chapter 3 verse 1.

I think the thing to remember about this young church is that it was planted in three weeks by a couple of folks who had just been brought to Europe after weeks of praying, and then finding nothing but difficulty. Paul and Silas and his team had been beaten and in prisons and falsely accused in Philippi, had traveled 100 more miles to here. Spent three weeks teaching his heart out. There's some fruit that we read about in the book of Acts, but after that, again they were chased out of town.

Many months later while Paul was in Athens, he sent Timothy back to see how the church was doing, and then he went on to Corinth, where he began to plant a church; actually, a work that would begin and spend a year and a half in. A tough to place minister. Large city, really, really perverse.

When Paul got the news that this church was doing well, he couldn't have been more excited. He wrote I Thessalonians just to say, man, God is good. Can't believe that there's anything left for just three weeks of being there. It had gone so well. Paul had expected so little. It encouraged him to begin to preach again, and he was excited.

When Timothy got back from delivering the first letter though, he brought some concerns. There was a letter circulating in town that Paul had said they'd missed the rapture. The people were under such persecution that they were being told this was the wrath of God. They couldn't escape. Lots of confusion.

Paul wrote this second letter, at least Chapter 2, to try to set it all in order. We went through it in lots of detail. There's a timeline. In Chapter 1 of this letter, Paul just bragged about God's goodness, was so

proud of these saints who had been faithful under such pressure. We finished last week Paul's words to them about waiting upon the Lord, and God's faithfulness, and that they would not be left behind. They would be delivered. That's God's plan.

We come to this chapter, the last short chapter here in Chapter 3. We, Lord be willing, will finish it next week.

Notice in verse 1 the word "finally." We kiddingly told you in I Thessalonians that when Paul says finally, there's at least two chapters left. That's not true here. There's only one chapter left. But Paul kind of turns from the doctrinal issue, very heavy kind of arguments and teachings that are lots of facts-driven and just need to be known and learned. And he turns to the practical method of how do they wait now when the Lord isn't come yet. How do we wait upon God? We have His promises, but what do we do?

This morning in the first five verses he just talks about one thing: Prayer. The needed to learn how to pray. His desire that this church would learn well how to pray.

Paul is a good pastor. For 30 years he spent traveling and preaching and establishing new churches, training elders. He understood how great a responsibility came with the work. He had a great privilege. He told Peter to feed the flock, or Jesus did, and tend the sheep. The apostles devoted themselves to teaching God's Word when the church was first born. In fact, in Acts Chapter 6, you'll read about the apostles giving themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. That was really their main focus of attention.

When Paul left the Ephesian church elders for his last trip towards Jerusalem, he said to them in Chapter 20, "Make sure that you teach the whole counsel of God's word. Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. Now tell them about what God has to say."

Paul loved the church. He loved this church. He'd only been there for three weeks, but he loved what God was doing. He turns from the doctrinal teachings to the practical applications, and he begins with this in verse 1, "Finally, brethren," family, "pray for us, that the word of God may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it

is with you."

Pray for us. There are few folks in the Bible that had the gifts that Paul had for ministry. I think if you study his life, and there's certainly a lot of it to look at, he had immense natural talents. He was given the best rabbinical instruction that the world could offer. He was brilliant when he turned to logic, he was persuasive in his thinking, he was very articulate and clear in his communication. He had been at it for years. And he was a fearless guy. In a culture that killed Christians, he was the loudest voice on the planet. And yet he relied on none of that. He writes to this church that he had been to for so little time, "I need your prayers. I need you to pray for me." The man who was arguably the strongest spiritual leader of his day knew where to turn when he needed help. He turned to the Lord and to his people and asked them to pray.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians in Chapter 3, he said to them, "The things that I used to count as gain for me," or the things I counted on, if I took pride in my life, "I now count as a loss for Christ. Everything I would count as loss just for the excellency of knowing Him," His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering, "that I might be useful to him. I count what I had as rubbish, that I might gain to know Him." Which kind of tells you what Paul thought about his abilities, and without the Lord, what he assessed their value to be.

What had been a source of pride for him and joy now was just handed to the Lord. God, you can use these things, but if you don't use me, I'm not going anywhere. And it is certainly one of those growth steps in their lives that whatever God has gifted you with, if you try to use what He has given you, you might get famous and wealthy, but you won't be fruitful at all, until God is given what He has given to you. And when you relinquish those things to Him, now you've got something, and now He's got something in you. It is not your talents that are needed, it is your surrender that is what God is looking for. You're relying on Him to use you is paramount in our spiritual well-being.

And Paul was certainly convinced that if anything was coming out of this life, God was going to have to use him. He says to these folks, "Can you just pray for me?" He asked for prayer a lot. Wrote to the Romans, pray for

me. Wrote to the Corinthians, pray for us. Wrote to the Ephesians in Chapter 6, pray for us. "Seek the Lord for us, that I could have my mouth opened boldly." He wrote to the Colossians in Chapter 4 verse 3, he said, "Pray for us, that a door might be opened for us, because that's why I'm in jail, because I've been preaching." So pray for us.

We will never arrive in our spiritual walk with God at a place of very effective life until we pray; until you learn how to pray, and to surrender yourself to the Lord. Our daily walk in any ministry success that we would hope for has to come from our Lord's involvement in our lives. Pastor Chuck used to tell us young boys at ministry school in the '70s, "Until you pray, you can't do anything for God. After you pray, you can do anything." But the church has to go forward on its knees. And Paul was certainly convinced of that, and he cries out to the church here, pray for me.

The word "pray" here, by the way, is in the present tense, which would translate, would you just always pray for me, or put me on your prayer list. Don't just pray for me once and forget about me. Let me ask you personally, how strong is your prayer life? Or, how much are you convinced that praying makes a difference? You find yourself involved with it more often than not. Would you say your prayer life is exemplary? Would you stand up and just say to people, pray like I pray, and the church would be much better for it? What if the whole church prayed like you pray? Would we be moving forward or we'd be in trouble? How's your prayer life?

We believe in prayer here at the church certainly enough to pray every Saturday morning, women and men alternating. We have monthly prayer meetings for our missionaries that are out in the field, because it's the best way we can support them. We pray before every service, and you've seen the signs around the campus although there's a lot of busyness around the campus right now but we pray for you before the service begins.

I love the fact that Paul of all people says just pray for us. He'd given them all of his teachings and all, and now he gets just pray for us. And he doesn't just ask for prayer, but he asks for specific prayer. Notice in verse 1 he asks that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified. I'm Paul says, could you pray

for me, that when I go out and share the gospel, it can go forward without hindrance. It can have a free reign, a track that is open, obstacles that are removed. Just pray that the gospel spreads quickly and easily. Paul wanted to see people get saved. He wanted the word preached. He didn't want the opposition that he so often ran into.

And by the way, if you read about Paul's life in Corinth in Acts 18 and 19, it was a horrible place to minister. It was the most perverse town around. There was opposition everywhere he turned. Now, the Lord said to Paul, "I'll keep you. No one's going to hurt you." And he almost needed to hear that from the Lord directly, because everyone was out to hurt him. He had an assurance from the Lord of being protected somewhat.

But it wasn't easy, and it didn't go so easy in Corinth. Paul just said, could you just pray for open doors? That the gospel could go out without hindrance. Isn't that something we should be praying for? Especially in our world today, where it seems like the gospel's just hindered everywhere you turn. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Chapter 6, he said, "Pray that utterance would be given to me, that I might open my mouth boldly to make known the mysteries of the gospel." Said the same thing to the Colossians. Just pray for an open door for me as I'm sharing.

Secondly, he prayed that the word of the Lord could be glorified. Notice what it says in verse 1, "and be glorified." The word "glorified" in its simplest form means to be honored, or to be respected, or to be praised, or to be held in high esteem. Paul said, not only do I pray for open doors, but I pray that when people hear God's Word, they'll respect what they hear.

Now, that's not really the way it goes in our world today, is it? It works like that in the church. We open our Bibles and we all have great respect for what God has to say. Take it to the world, though, it's a different story. When you say "the Bible says," well, look, there's a lot of people running around in political pulpits quoting the Bible completely out of context, and there's very little respect for it.

Paul said pray that the word of God would be glorified; that when people hear it, they would honor it. When Paul

was in Antioch of Pisidia there's a couple of Antiochs in the New Testament, but in Acts Chapter 13 they arrived there and they went to the synagogue, and they began to share the word of God, you will read there in Acts Chapter 13. Eventually, and very quickly, many of the Jewish religious folks became envious. They contradicted what Paul had said. They began to blaspheme the Lord. They began to oppose the things that were spoken of by Paul. There was no honor for God's word. Paul and Barnabas had said very boldly, said to these folks, "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you; but if you want to reject it, and you judge yourself not worthy of eternal life, from now on we're going to take that word of God to the Gentiles." And they left the synagogue and they went out into the streets. And then it says the Gentiles were happy about it. They began to glorify the word of the Lord. That's exactly the words that Paul uses here. They began to respect what God had to say, and as a result the word of God began to spread throughout the region.

Paul said, Look, pray that we don't get opposition when we preach, and pray that when people hear God's word, it'll be received that way. Those are good prayers to put on your list.

And then Paul says, I pray that it will go with them, and with me, like it has gone with you. No argument. I mean, the march of the gospel through Thessalonica was rapid and phenomenal, I would say unbelievable. The inroads there were the exception rather than the rule. You will not find any other church that did this well this quickly with such little support. It's usually not the way it goes. You look there and you go, that's what I want, but that's not usually what you get.

But Paul said, why don't we pray it happens here like it's happening with you. He'd been there three weeks, run off. And Corinth was such a tough place, and the people were so resistant to the word. And even when Paul left a year and a half later, he had to write letter after letter to them saying, could you guys just suck it up and do something right? It was a disappointment in many ways. I mean, the Lord was working, certainly; but man, did this church have trouble. But Paul wasn't giving up. He just wanted prayer and asked that the Lord might begin to work.

We were talking with a couple folks the other day. Back in the late '70s when I started pastoring, there was a movie out called "Thief in the Night." Any of you remember that movie? You have to be older, I think. In fact, there was a lady in the front row first service, she goes, "I got saved at that movie." But we used to show this movie; and to be honest with you, it's one of the worst movies I've ever seen. Poorly acted, poorly underfunded, it looks terrible, and just about its presentation except God's hand was upon it. And I remember doing Friday night movies at Downey Calvary. We used to call them "New Creature Features." And we would show movies, and people would get saved, we'd share the gospel. But this particular movie that was so popular at the time, we showed one Friday night at 7 o'clock, 1,500 people showed up to see the movie. I shared ten minutes after the movie the gospel, and 500 people got saved. And then there were 2,000 people outside waiting to get in to see this ridiculous movie, because God was working. And it was an amazing work of God's Spirit. Not like that now. Now if it's rainy, you don't go to church. "Well, it's rainy. It's cold. I don't want to go." Not exactly the same as we saw in those days where there was this great hunger. We need to pray for God to work and the gospel to be exalted and honored. And that there will be this desire, as they found in Thessalonica, again amongst God's people. We need a revival again. And Paul prayed for fruitfulness and openness and freedom from conflict.

He went in verse 2 and he said, "and that we might be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; because not everyone has faith." That was the norm. You read Paul's life, all of these years on the road, the norm was he was always being assaulted by people that had no faith, were very unreasonable, and very angry. They were wicked. They complicated the work, they resisted God's spirit, they caused difficulty for Paul, they brought great suffering to the church. And that was pretty much Paul's experience.

And he uses two words to describe them. The word "unreasonable" means out of place. I think sometimes, I don't know about you, but I look at our society and then you go, that's unreasonable. Doesn't even make sense. What you're doing doesn't make sense. But that's the way spiritual opposition is too. It doesn't make sense. You see it, but the people who resist you don't see it. The

word "unreasonable" here is sometimes translated insane, but not in the Bible, and I don't think Paul meant that at all.

The word for wicked means malignant or aggressively evil. It's more than just you don't want what God has said; you want to work real hard at destroying what God has said. It's evil that's activated, or active evil, if you will.

Paul was facing folks that didn't make any sense, they were out of place in their arguments, and they were facing people that had an agenda: To destroy.

And then Paul says "not everyone has faith." These are folks in Corinth that had even gotten into the church. Paul prays, would you pray for us that we're delivered from the threats and the power and the opposition from men that seek to just hinder the work? Not all have faith. The Thessalonians church had seen Paul chased out of town after three weeks, they were aware of that certainly.

One of the things that you and I as Christians face is that we have an enemy, Satan, who spends his entire days looking to hinder what God is doing. Doesn't want you to love God, doesn't want you to obey the Lord, doesn't want you to see the fruit of obedience, doesn't want you to pray, wants to take you away from everything that God would like to do in your life. It's his sworn duty. He seeks to block what God wants to do. He'll tell you that you'll fail. He stands in your way.

There are certainly many places today, even in our missionary endeavors, countries where we can't go publicly because the government won't allow the gospel. They'll stand against it. They don't want the word of God. They don't want you there. In China today the largest church is underground. Millions of people that meet from house to house, and they move their meeting places simply because if they're found, they'll be arrested, they'll be exposed, they'll be put into work camps, or worse.

When God begins a work, some will believe, but not all will have faith. And there will always be that active wickedness that will seek to oppose what God seeks to do. Don't be too surprised if you're out ministering to people, that all of a sudden you run into some really

unreasonable, but wicked, opposition.

We had an incident a few years ago where we had sent our radio program to a station manager looking to get on a certain station. We never had any problems, but he called and he said:

"We don't want that pastor," that would be me, "on our radio, because he spoke at a certain conference last year and he recommended a teacher who we think is a deceiver." I responded to him and said, "I wasn't at that conference." "Oh, yes, you were." "Yeah, I wasn't." "No, we know that you were."

I ordered a C.D. of the conference, and I called him and said, "I'd like to send you a copy of the entire conference so that you can see that I wasn't there." And he said, "I don't need to see that. I have my information." And that was it. We're not on that radio station. I guess the Lord didn't want us on there. But this guy was unreasonable and wicked. His name, no. I don't do stuff like that.

But there's no way to reason with unreasonable people, and you're going to find that that's going to be the case for you. You are going to go out to share the Lord, and the response and the pushback's not going to make much sense. But there's a devil out there, man. There's a Satan out there. There's one who hates the things of God. This isn't your home. You're going into a place of war.

Paul says, please pray for me, that I'd be delivered from these kinds of wicked instruments of resistance that aren't very reasonable. Here's the good news though: God moves mountains and works Himself around unreasonable people. Here's some things to pray for.

Now, lest you think when you read verse 1 and 2 that Paul is in the place where he feels almost hopeless, Paul goes on to declare in verse 3 and 4 that he knows God will work. It doesn't mean we shouldn't pray, but he knows that ultimately God will answer that prayer and accomplish His work. In other words, that the challenge isn't a losing proposition. It is always a winning proposition.

He says this: "But," in all of those things that you're praying for, "But the Lord is faithful. He will

establish you and He will guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in Him, in the Lord, concerning you, that you'll do and will to do the things we've commanded you," or taught you.

Paul goes on to say, I know God is faithful. I'm asking you to pray. I know that the battle is real. We need a free reign. We need His Word to be honored. We should be praying for that. There's great opposition. But I know that the Lord is faithful, that He can be counted on. Even as I'm praying, I'm not panicking, I'm not worried, but I'm told I should pray, and so I'm praying.

When Paul was in prison in Rome, at the Mamertine prison you can go there actually. We've sat in his little dungeon once in Rome he was about to die when he wrote II Timothy. But he said to Timothy, at my first defense, because he had gone to jail and gotten out, and wrote I Timothy and then had got rearrested. He said, "When I was first imprisoned, no one stood with me." He said, "I was here all by myself. May God not lay it in charge to those who should have been here. But the Lord was with me. He strengthened me. He preached the message fully through me. The gospel was heard by the Gentiles. God delivered me from the mouth of lions. He delivered me." And then he says, "But now I'm going to die." But God has been with us through the whole thing. He was faithful.

The battle is often engaged by you and I, but things don't always go smoothly. We need to pray. But the outcome is never in doubt. Does that make sense? We have to pray. The outcome is never in doubt, but God says you should pray, that you will always know who to depend upon and who to look to.

The Lord is faithful. He does two things: He establishes you. That's a work within the heart. The word "to establish" here means to ground or to strengthen. It speaks of an inward work. And then the Lord will protect you from the outward, from the enemy, who is behind it all. Jude wrote, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and stumbling, and to present you faultless before His presence with great joy." That's really the work of God. He'll keep you within and without. He will keep your heart, He'll keep your ministry, but you're going to pray.

But notice God is faithful. I love the fact that God is faithful. When you go pray, know this: God is faithful. Paul said to the Corinthians in I Corinthians Chapter 10, that "No temptation has overcome you except that is common to man. And with every temptation, you'll be able to be given by Him strength to escape." Nothing will overcome you. God will only give you what you can handle and He'll help you to handle it. Know that. Paul was not freaking out, he just wanted prayer. But He was sure God would answer.

If I said to you, how many verses do you know or have you memorized if we were to say, share one right now of God's faithfulness? It's a good thing to, if you're doing any kind of memorization, those are great verses to know, that God is faithful. Your faithfulness endures to every generation, we read in the scriptures. Great is your faithfulness. Great is your faithfulness. New every morning, your mercy. Go find some of those verses. Make sure you know them. Because whenever you have to face anything, you should always remember that God is faithful. Now, that doesn't mean He will exempt you from natural disasters or from the ills of life. He doesn't promise to make you immune from hatred, or discrimination, or even death. But through it all, with Him, we are more than conquerors through Him that loves us.

Paul said, pray for us. Man, we need prayer. We're getting harassed and hindered. There's unreasonableness and wickedness, and there's an enemy. There's an evil one. We know God will keep you. God will do the work, but you still have to pray. Prayer is the battle that we have to fight. But if you don't forget God's faithfulness, prayer is easy. It's good. God should hear from us a lot. I hope he hears from you a lot.

And then Paul says in verse 4 that he has confidence not in them, but in the Lord concerning them, that you will do what's right, you'll continue to act upon what you've learned, that you'll stay faithful to the Lord. We trust the Lord concerning you.

I like that a lot. And I'll share that, from a personal standpoint, as a pastor the most exciting thing is to see people get saved and Christians walk with God. The most frustrating thing is to see those who claim and speak a good game, but not live it. And there's plenty of folks

like that around. They talk, but they don't do. They want you to believe that they're more spiritual than they are, and yet you see them every week, you go, that's not real good. It is easy to become cynical and sarcastic and discouraged watching saints make the wrong choices. It is so good to learn that the church belongs to God. You just do your part, and then you leave it alone. Rather than stress out every response from people that you wish would do better, you just trust the Lord.

And I love that Paul said, "We trust the Lord concerning you, that you'll be obedient, you'll continue to walk with God. I'm just trusting the Lord that you'll do well." Makes a big difference, especially put yourself in your own life. You're praying for people; they're not doing the right thing. You wish things were different, and they're not. And yet you have to just trust the Lord.

Moses, when he stood before the Red Sea between, he and the people and the army coming, he trusted the Lord and he led them through, and he was the "What are we going to do, Moses?" "Well, come on. I'll go talk to the Lord. We'll figure this out." It's not foolish to trust the Lord.

Paul had taught the saints for a few weeks when he was with them. He'd sent Timothy back to reinforce what he had taught. He writes them the second letter to go over what he taught them the first time.

Look, I have to trust the Lord. And I learned a long time ago as a pastor, I can't make you love God. If I could, I would. It'll do you some good. I can't force you to serve the Lord. Can't make you want to bear fruit. I can't make you go to church. I can't make you open your Bible. I can't make you get on your knees. If I could do that stuff, I would do all of those, starting with me. But I trust that the Lord is building the church. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it."

We're to pray for others, we're to seek to encourage their walks, we're to teach all that we know. We try to not be discouraged, but keep our eyes on the Lord. You're going to run into deaf ears and unwilling hearts. You're going to run into difficult people. But, hey, the Lord works, doesn't He? And He's to be trusted. So that

God might move more mightily amongst us. That's always our prayer, that we would be doers of the word.

Paul ends this little encouragement on prayer by saying this, "Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ." He ends with a prayer for them. "May the Lord direct," the word to make your paths straight or make your progress easier. And then he picks two things: The love of God and the patience of Christ.

Now, in the Greek language most of the time what you read is very clear. This is not. It is not, because this genitive in Greek can either be subjective or objective. Either Paul said, I'm praying that you may love God more He's the object or I'm praying that you would realize God's love for you; that would be subjective, I apply it to myself. And both of them can be right, and I couldn't tell you which one is because of the way that it is written.

It is the same thing for the patience of Christ. The word "patience" here means to endure. It means when you're under the rock, you're not moving. You're going to push through till the end. You're not giving up someplace along the way. But the cognitive is either subjective or its objective, which means either you show the kind of patience that the Lord shows in not coming back yet, waiting for those last few to come, or it means that you have the patient heart of Jesus when it comes to the dealing that you have with others.

I suspect both of them are right, if they're not signified. Maybe the best summary of this verse is, may the Lord teach you to love as He does, and be as patient as He is, both in Him waiting to have us come in, and the way that you wait for God to work or to move.

I don't know if, I'm sure you have. One of the oft-quoted phrases in the Bible is "Wait on the Lord." You've read that before? I usually hate that verse, because waiting on the Lord is the worst, isn't it? I'd like to wait on the Lord for like two weeks, but that's it. Then I'd like to buy him a watch for Christmas. Come on! If there's ever a disruption in what God is doing in my life, it is usually caused by me not waiting. I want to mess in there and help and try to justify messing around rather than letting God work.

Abraham tried it with Hagar, ended up with Ishmael. Jacob and his mom Rachel tried to secure the promise of the birthright or the firstborn that he wasn't supposed to have, but the Lord wanted him to have, and it ended up not only breaking up Jacob's family, but Jacob would never see his mother again, even though she was around for quite some time. He was driven from the house. Never works to get ahead of the Lord.

Look, pray for us. I want the door open as we preach. I'm praying that God would make people hear God's Word and glorify or honor it; that He would deliver us from spiritual opposition from unreasonable people that are driven in their wickedness by an enemy that is for real. Not everyone has faith. Sometimes they're in the church, but they're out just to destroy. I know God is faithful. I know that He'll establish your heart and guard you from the evil one, and teach you about His love, and help you to be patient. Good pastor Paul is.

If you have problems coming up with what to pray for, put me on your list. You should do that anyway. Pray for me. I will never be upset with that.

Next week we will finish the book. If you're lazy, don't come next week. These verses look too hard.