

Last Judgement – November 6, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5; 11-12 (NIV pg. 827)

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. 4) Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5) All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. . . **11) With this in mind, we constantly pray for you**, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. 12) We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ;

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to meet someone like the Apostle Paul? Although you and I will never have the chance to meet Paul in this lifetime, we can get to know him through the Scriptures. The picture we get of Paul from the Scriptures is that of an individual who is zealous for the Lord and compassionate toward those whom he served with the Gospel.

Those two characteristics are certainly in display in our lesson for today. These words are the opening chapter of Paul's second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. Previously he had expressed his concern for these individuals as he encouraged them to continue in the faith despite the trials and troubles that confronted them. He urged them to avoid sexual immorality, to love one another sincerely, and to earn their own living as they awaited the glorious return of the Lord and the resurrection on the Last Day.

Shortly after writing that letter, Paul got wind of the fact that there were those in Thessalonica who had become convinced that there was no hope for them to escape the persecutions being directed against them. Paul did the only things that he could from a distance – he lifted them up in prayer to the Lord and then he wrote a second letter to them to assure them that the Lord would indeed come to their rescue. This letter like many of the other letters that Paul wrote shows us Paul's pastoral concern for others. Paul had the heart of a loving and caring pastor who wanted the people he served to know that they were in his heart and in his prayers.

Dear friends, today I'd like to use the Paul's words to remind you that

Theme: You are In My Prayers

1. I thank God because your faith is growing and your love is increasing
2. I ask God to enable you to persevere in hardships
3. I pray that God will empower you in your service to him

Paul acknowledged that he counted it blessing to be able to serve the Christians in Thessalonica when he told them: **We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. 4) Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.** Paul's concern for the Thessalonians was shared by his partners Timothy and Silas. Timothy was the one who had reported that the Thessalonians were still facing some challenging times after they had received the letter he delivered to them. It was their confession of Christ that brought them trouble, yet they remained firm in their confession of him. They placed themselves confidently in the Lord's hands, convinced that he would be their refuge and strength. According to his gracious will, he used their troubles for their good.

Paul thanked God on behalf of the believers in Thessalonica. Although they were facing troubles and difficulties, God was strengthening their faith.

Of course, faith is invisible but the expression of faith often shines brightly and that's what had caught Paul's attention. The love the Thessalonians had for each other was increasing. It would appear that the persecutions and trials that they were enduring had provided the individual Christians with the opportunity to put their faith into action as they showed love and concern for one another's, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

In Christ-like fashion, they forgave each other for their sins and failures. Their troubles and trials ultimately drew them closer together. Anyone who needed aid and assistance became an object of loving concern. The troubles, difficulties, and persecutions that troubled the Thessalonians drove them closer to the Lord and to one another. It made them recognize their need for the Lord's help and aid. They became a faith strengthening opportunity for them. In fact, he held their situation up as a model for other Christians as he boasted about their perseverance and faith in the midst of adversity. His boasting was really a proclamation of praise for the Lord who had strengthened them and encouraged them.

Paul assured them: **All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.** When someone suffers for the name of Christ that is evidence that he belongs to the Lord. Peter explained this in his letter to the people in Asia Minor who were experiencing troubles similar to the ones that plagued the Thessalonians. **Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ...If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.** (1 Peter 4:12-14 NIV)

When it seems like the evil doers prosper and the Christians suffer in this world, our Old Adams may draw the conclusion that perhaps we are suffering for our sins. Paul's words of encouragement would help the Thessalonians to set aside such notions. The Lord was blessing them – that was God's judgement on them. They would be counted worthy of living in his kingdom. They were worthy to live in the kingdom of the Lord because Christ Jesus had cleansed them from their sins. Christ's righteousness made them worthy to live in his kingdom. Persecutions, trials, troubles caused by sinful men could not change that!

Mindful of the blessings the Thessalonians had received from the Lord during their trials; Paul, Timothy and Silas turned to the Lord in prayer. When they thought about the wonderful judgement that God would speak to believers on the Last Day when he invites them to enjoy life with Christ in heaven; Paul and his companions were moved to pray for the Thessalonians. **With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. 12) We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Their prayer was that the Lord would continue to be with the members of the congregation in Thessalonica, strengthening them by his power and enabling them to continue to serve the Lord and each other as their faith desired. Paul and his companions wanted the Lord to guide their thoughts and actions and to enable them to live under him in his kingdom and to serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

As the Thessalonians were enabled by the Lord's power to stand firm in their trials, to resist their Old Adams and to put their faith into action as they continued to serve the Lord and each other, the name of the Lord Jesus would be honored among them. Their actions would show their thankfulness to the Lord Jesus for his blessings to them. Their love for one another would be a reflection of their love for Jesus. Ultimately, Paul prayed that they would be glorified in the Lord. This was really a prayer asking that the Lord would preserve them in their faith until he would come again in his glory to present them holy and blameless before his heavenly Father according to his grace.

When Paul, Timothy and Silas wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica they wanted them to know that they were in their prayers. They thanked God because their faith was growing and their love was increasing. They asked God to enable them to continue to persevere in hardship and to empower them in their service to him.

Dear friends I want you to know that you are in my prayers.

1. I thank God because your faith is growing and your love is increasing.

When I think of our congregation and those who gather with us for worship I'm amazed at what I see. It's amazing for me to see a group of individuals and families who for the most part never knew each other before they met each other in our congregation. I see a group of diverse individuals many who are "transplants" to our community. I see people who have come to hear the word of the Lord, people who want to be assured of the Lord's forgiveness and who desire to grow in their faith. I can't help but thank God for the unity of faith that he has granted to us.

I'm thankful for God's promise that where two or three gather in his name that he is with us. God promises that his Word will accomplish what he desires. That's reason an additional reason for thanksgiving. I can't help but thank God for the faith that his Word and Sacraments has produced in your hearts and in your lives. When I see people who were total strangers sharing hugs, weeping tears, offering their prayers with other and for each other I can't help but marvel at power of God that is at work in your lives. When I experience that love personally – it's almost a bit overwhelming. To say the least it's humbling to think that the Lord has blessed me with the opportunity to serve such a congregation of believers. It is my privilege to thank God for you!

Sadly, there's something else I see when I look at those who are a part of our congregation. I see people who are aching and hurting – people whose lives have been affected negatively by sin (as has mine). I see people who long to hear the Lord's words of comfort and assurance which the Lord has called me to share with you. I see many whose lives have been touched by troubles of one sort or another. I see those who are struggling with physical, emotional and spiritual challenges. It is my humble privilege to be able to support and encourage you our public worship services as well as in private, confidential consultations with the promises and hope that God offers us in his Word. And it is also my privilege to pray to the Lord on your behalf.

Dear friends I want you to know that you are in my prayers.

2. I ask God to enable you to persevere in hardships.

I have no doubt that in many cases the increase of love I mentioned earlier is the result of various hardships that have come into our lives. Maybe a hardship of one sort or another led you to our community and congregation. Perhaps some hardship has caused you to become more interested in seeking out the Lord. You may have been bearing these hardships for an extended period of time. On the other hand, maybe they are a

recent development. Often you have shared these hardships with me in confidence. You and I might be the only people who know about them. Other times your hardships are public knowledge.

I'm not immune to hardship either – it's a part of my life as it is a part of everyone's life in this sinful world. The prophet Jeremiah helps us put our troubles and hardships into perspective. He wrote: **I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.** (Lamentations 3:19-23 NIV)

It is with that confidence that I ask God to enable you to preserve in your hardships. Through them, his blessings will become evident to you and others. His unfailing love and compassion will uplift us and sustain us each and every day. He will manage all things for our benefit. As his dearly loved children, we will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. You are in my prayers. It is my prayer that God will lighten your burdens in keeping with his will, that he will use them for your blessing, that he will enable you to preserve under them and that at last he will set you free from them forever.

Dear friends when we understand that God uses adversity for our good we can't help but seek for ways to thank and serve him with our lives. You are in my prayers because I know that God has blessed you through adversity.

3. I pray that God will empower you in your service to him

The Lord places new opportunities before us every day – opportunities to respond to his love and faithfulness. It is my prayer that the Lord will strengthen your faith through his Word and Sacrament to empower you to grow in your service to him so that through you the name of the Lord may be glorified. There are a variety of ways that we serve the Lord as we reflect his love in our relationships with others. However, there's one way that comes to mind in light that comes to mind in connection with the thoughts of our text for today.

We've been reminded that the Lord blesses us through hardship – as we praise his name before others in our times of trouble as stress we will be modeling the example of the Thessalonians. It is my prayer that the Lord will empower you in your service to him in every situation of life so that his name be glorified and that others may be drawn to his glory.

Dear friends you are in my prayers. Pray also for me: thanking him for the faith and love that he has given to me, asking him to enable me to preserve in hardship and to empower me in service to him as by his grace I serve you to his glory. Amen.