

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/3/93 PM

II Thessalonians 1:11-12 "The Place of Prayer in the Advance of the Gospel"

Intro:

Q: Do you think America needs a revival?

Whose responsibility is revival? God's? Ours?

I read some powerful words this week, words though written nearly 100 years ago, speak accurately of our times. Listen to the convicting questions Edward McKendree Bounds posed in his classic Purpose in Prayer, "Are we concerned about the coldness of the church? Do we grieve over the lack of conversions? Does our soul go out to God in midnight cries for the outpouring of His Spirit?"

"If not, part of the blame lies at our door. If we do our part, God will do His. Around us is a world lost in sin, above us is a God willing and able to save; it is our to build the bridge that links heaven and earth, and prayer is the mighty instrument that does the work." (123)

Of Richard Baxter it was said that "he stained his study walls with praying breath." George Whitefield, the great 18th century evangelist, is said to have prayed once, "O Lord, give me souls or take my soul." (Bounds, 122) Charles Haddon Spurgeon once remarked, "If any minister can be satisfied without conversions, he shall have no conversions." (114)

Dr. J. Wilber Chapman observed, "Revivals are born in prayer." When Wesley prayed, England was revived. When Knox prayed, Scotland was refreshed. (Bounds, 117)

Q: Do you pray for revival?

Q: Did you realize that prayer holds a vital key to the advancement of the gospel of Christ? We'll see that tonight as we turn to II Thessalonians 1.

Our aim on Sunday evenings is to learn to pray more biblically. To accomplish this, we have engaged in a topical Bible study which we've called, "Learning to Pray More Biblically."

Approach of Series: To explore a sampling of prayers recorded in the NT.

1. Romans 1:8-10
2. Philippians 1:9-11
3. Colossians 1:9-14
4. II Thessalonians 1:11-12
5. I Timothy 2:1-2
6. James 5:13-18
7. Acts 4:23-31

Tonight: Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians (II Thes 1:10-11)

Key: Prayer holds a vital key to the advancement of the gospel of Christ.

- I. Paul's Thankfulness for the Church (3-4)
 - A. They had a Growing Faith.
 - B. They had an Abounding Love.
 - C. They had a Model Reputation.
 - D. They exhibited Endurance in the face of Persecution.
- II. Paul's Prayer for the Church (11-12)
 - A. He prayed with Persistence.
 - B. He prayed with Purpose.
 - 1. For God's Working IN the church
 - 2. For God's Working THROUGH the church

Footnote: What Paul asked the Church to pray for him (3:1-2)

- A. That God would advance the Message (1)
- B. That God would protect the Messenger (2)

Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, wrote this letter to the church at Thessalonica. II Thessalonians was written shortly after I Thessalonians, and both letters are two of Paul's earliest writings.

This was a special church to Paul.

I. Paul's Thankfulness for the Church (3-4)

Vv "We are bound to thank God always for you..."

Paul said he felt an obligation, a duty, a compulsion to thank God for the believers at Thessalonica. Why? He highlights 4 reasons...

A. They had a Growing Faith.

See: Acts 17

Paul started the church at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Do you recall his strategy? He preached in the Jewish synagogue for 3 consecutive sabbaths.

Q: What was his message to them? 17:2-3 He preached Christ!

Q: What was the effect of his ministry? 17:4 Many were saved!

But not everyone was impressed.

"certain lewd fellows of the baser sort" (5)

Q: What did the opposition say about the Christian missionaries?

V 6 "These that have turned the world upside down."

Wow! What a testimony! May we never underestimate the power of the gospel. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it! The gospel turns the world upside down! That means it will save people. It will also ruffle a few feathers.

So it did in Thessalonica. Paul was forced to leave due to the hostility of the Jewish antagonists (10). The young converts were forced to weather their storm without the aid of their spiritual father Paul.

But God was with them. They not only stood. They flourished!

Paul thanked God for 4 marks which the Thessalonians evidenced. First, they had a growing faith. They had a big view of God, and it got bigger every day!

B. They had an Abounding Love.

V 3 "and the love...aboundeth"

They loved each other. Love is to be the trademark for disciples of Christ. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples.

But notice those words "exceedingly" and "aboundeth." Faith and love are not static concepts. There's always room for growth and expansion and development.

C. They had a Model Reputation.

V 4 "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches"

NIV "Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith." Paul could point his finger at the Thessalonian church and say, "There's the way it ought to be. There's a model church."

They were a model in one particular area.

D. They exhibited Endurance in the face of Persecution.

V 4 "for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations ye endure"

Evidently the hostility didn't let up after Paul left town. But that didn't diminish the enthusiasm of those young believers. They exhibited endurance.

That's kind of a rare trait these days.

Application: We talk about praying for revival.

Discuss: What would a revived church look like?

If genuine revival took place at WBC, what would be the visible effects? Obviously, people would be saved. Complacent sinners would repent and get serious about living for the Lord. Then what?

I would suggest to you that the 4 marks we've seen of the Thessalonian church are a pretty good summary of what a revived church would look like. A revived church would have a growing faith, an abounding love, a model reputation, and would exhibit endurance in the face of persecution.

Q: How do you pray for a church like that? Let's take a look...

II. Paul's Prayer for the Church (11-12)

Vv 11-12 "Wherefore we pray always for you..."

Let's break apart the apostle's prayer. Notice 2 characteristics...

A. He prayed with Persistence.

V 11 "We pray always for you."

It's always good when you practice what you preach! Remember what Paul commanded the Thessalonians about prayer in his first letter? I Th 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." That's what he did.

He prayed with persistence.

Discuss: What does it mean practically to "pray always"?

B. He prayed with Purpose.

V 11 "We pray...THAT"

Biblical prayer must be marked by purpose. We're not praying biblically when we offer God "pat" formulas or canned recitations. We're not praying biblically when we're scraping the milky way with impressive sounding, religious jargon.

Paul prayed with purpose. And so must we.

Let's notice the specific requests Paul laid out before the Lord...

1. For God's Working IN the church

V 11 "THAT God would count you worthy of this calling..."

What does that mean? The "calling of God" is a prominent theme with Paul. Usually, when Paul speaks of the "calling of God," He has in mind that moment when God calls men out of darkness into His glorious light (Rom 8:30 "Whom He did predestinate them He also called"). God's call is an effective call.

Then what does Paul mean when he prays that God would count the Thessalonians "worthy" of this calling? For starters, let's reinforce the biblical truth that NOONE is worthy of the God's call. We are all UNWORTHY. Furthermore, Paul's not implying that they might fall away from the status of called people (Morris, 210).

Paul's prayer is this. "Father, help my friends in Thessalonica to live up to Your calling. They haven't arrived yet. Please continue to do Your mighty work IN them."

This involved:

"fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness"

"the work of faith with power"

Key: God's work isn't over when He saves us.

Illust:

2. For God's Working THROUGH the church

V 12 "THAT the name of Christ may be glorified..."

God has a great work He desires to do IN us. He also has a great work He wants to accomplish THROUGH us. What is that?

He desires to "glorify the name of Christ in us."

In our day, "names" have little significance usually. We use names merely to distinguish one person from another. But in Bible times, the name was much more than that. The name summed up the whole character of a person.

When Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would bring glory to the Name of Jesus Christ, here's what He was asking. "Father, I pray that my friends will live such lives of virtue that glory will be given to the One responsible for that virtue.

To glorify means "to be weighty." Did you realize that we can add weight to the reputation of Christ, or take away weight, by the way we live? Our lives can either cause other people to be impressed with Christ, or distracted from Christ.

How can our lives truly reflect Christ?

Only by Grace--v 12 "according to the grace of our God..."

So Paul prayed that God would do a great work THROUGH the Thessalonians.

Illust:

Tran: Paul prayed for his friends. They needed his prayers. He was convinced that his prayers could have a vital impact on the advance of the gospel in Thessalonica.

But I want you to see something else, a footnote. Paul needed prayer too.

Footnote: What Paul asked the Church to pray for him (3:1-2)

A. That God would advance the Message (1)

V 1 "Finally...pray for us, that the Word may have free course..."

Paul was a great apostle. But the reason he was great and the reason he had such a great ministry was NOT because of sheer natural ability. It was because he availed himself to supernatural ability.

He needed prayer. He asked for prayer. Not for personal comfort either. He asked for prayer that God would advance the message of the gospel.

Illust:

B. That God would protect the Messenger (2)

V 2 "And that we may be delivered from wicked men..."

Paul's not asking for general safety in his traveling and preaching. He has in mind some enemies of the Cross. The Thessalonians knew who they were. Perhaps they were the hostile Jewish leaders who ran Paul out of Thessalonica.

Paul knew he was in a spiritual battle. He needed protection. Again, his concern was not so much for himself, as for the spread of the gospel. God uses messengers to make Christ known. Those messengers need divine help and protection.

Conclusion:

Key: Prayer holds a vital key to the advancement of the gospel of Christ.

Communion: