

May the Lord Prepare You for His Coming

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Halifax: 17 September, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Our gracious Lord is so good to us as His people!

- Not only has He provided all that we need to be eternally pardoned through Jesus Christ and established us in eternal life through His Spirit,
 - But He has also given us all sorts of help in His word to enable us to flourish and to be comforted in our walk with Him.

In the passage we are considering today in 1 Thessalonians 3,

- Paul the Apostle tells us of his prayer for the church of the Thessalonians.
- Here we see what he thought important to bring before the throne of God for this church that he so dearly loved...
 - a church that was doing very well in the new life they had found in Jesus Christ.

What help there is in a passage like this for us!

- It shows us what we ought to be seeking from God for ourselves and for other Christians by prayer.
- And this particular prayer shows us how God works in us and how He prepares us for Jesus' coming.

Last week, we saw that when Paul, (who had been anxious about how the Thessalonians were getting on), had received a good report of their faithfulness,

- was all the more stirred up to pray for them and to help them...
- And here in 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13, we get to see the actual blessing he sought for them in prayer.

Please give me your attention as I read this prayer to you now.

- It is from 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

Thessalonians 3:11-13: Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy Word.

This morning, we will look at three things that Paul prays for the Thessalonians as they relate to us and what we ought to be praying for the church today.

I. First, we ought to pray that God's people will have access to the ministry of the Word.

A. In verse 11, Paul prays this in a way that was unique to his situation with the Thessalonians.

- He says: v. 11: **Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.**

1. We have seen how Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had brought the gospel to them.
 - And how they had been driven away by persecution against their will.
 - We have seen how Paul had tried again and again to return to them, but had been hindered every time by Satan.
 - We have seen how he finally sent Timothy, his young disciple in the ministry, to minister to them.

2. Paul wanted to go to them because they were new believers who had received the gospel in the midst of much persecution.
 - a. And they had no one to help them to become established in the faith.
 - They did not even have a New Testament because the New Testament had not yet been written.
 - One of the reasons that our gracious God did this was so that Paul would write the two letters that we have in our Bible to them—
 - letters that have been a tremendous help to the church over all these years!
 - But Paul was right to do all that he could to get to them.
 - b. He has finally sent Timothy to them, but there was still more that needed to be done to fully establish them in the faith.
 - And so Paul prays that he will be able to go to them...
 - that (as he says) **our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.**

3. Notice that Paul recognises that ultimately it is God who is in control of getting him there.
 - a. Although Satan was the one that hindered him from going,
 - Paul knew that if God had wanted him to go, He would easily overthrow Satan's efforts.
 - He knew that it is the sovereign Lord alone who directs our way, and that is why he prays to Him.
 - b. But notice something interesting here—
 - Paul prays to two persons as one...
 - He prays to God the Father, that is one person, and He prays to our Lord Jesus Christ, that is the other person...
 - He prays to both of them as persons who are in full control of what happens—as the sovereign God Almighty.
 - It is not right to direct prayers to anyone but God alone.
 - No one else has control of the situation.
 - But at the same time, Paul prays to them as only one God...
 - This is especially clear in the original language because the word *direct* is not plural but singular.
 - In Greek, the verb could indicate the plural: “may they direct” or the singular, “may he direct,” and here it is singular!

- This points us clearly to the Trinity—that there is one God in three persons.
- Here you have two persons that are asked in prayer to do what only God can do, and yet they are regarded as only one God.

B. But now let's consider how this prayer of Paul might be imitated by us.

1. In summary, we ought to pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ would sovereignly bring His Word to His people.
 - We know that Christians, whether they are just starting out or whether they have been at it for a long time, need God's Word.
 - They cannot grow without it.
 - And the New Testament emphasises that they especially need live preaching—under the oversight of the preacher himself and the other elders of the church.
 - I mentioned this to you last week—and here we meet it again.
 - God has appointed that we should have living elders and ministers giving us oversight.
 - So we should pray that God would provide this to His people.
2. This general prayer could be applied to many different situations.
 - a. For example, we are praying for Covenanters ARP and Mount Zion ARP, that God would direct faithful ministers to them.
 - b. And we are praying that He would raise up additional elders for us.
 - c. And we are praying that faithful churches could be established in places like Fredericton and Truro.
 - d. And I am praying for some people I know who are professing Christians and are not currently part of a local church.
 - e. And I hope that all of you pray regularly that even though you have a minister here, I would be faithful in bringing the pure Word of God to you and that you and your children would be faithful in receiving it.
 - f. And when you read the Bible at home, or minister the word to your family or to a friend, you should pray for God to bring His truth to you and others.

TRANS> Those are the things that are at the heart of Paul's prayer that we ought to imitate.

- But now let's move on the second petition that we are given here.

II. The second thing we are shown to pray for Christians is that they would increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

A. This is a very intense request!

1. Paul is asking for a great deluge of love—an all-out overflowing flood!
 - a. Timothy had already told Paul that he had found the Thessalonians loving each other and Paul has already commended them for this a couple of times.

- Their love was already very visible and very powerful so that they were examples to other churches.
- b. But Paul is asking God for yet more love!
- Not just a bit more—and not even for mere growth in love...
 - He is asking God that they would increase and abound in love!
 - The first word refers to increasing to the point of overflowing—so here is a river of love overflowing its banks...
 - And the second word means pretty much the same thing—it speaks of a superabundance.
 - You might say that many churches had a water gun of love, but the Thessalonians had a garden hose or maybe even a fire hose...
 - but Paul is praying for a tidal wave!
- c. Chrysostom, the famous preacher from the fourth century, asked,
- “Do you see the unrestrainable madness of love that is shown by these words?”
 - It was an insane amount of love.
2. Keep in mind that the love that we are to imitate is that of Christ’s love for us.
- Here was the love that brought Him down from His place in glory as the Son of God to become flesh and to bear the shame of our sins on the cross.
 - And delighted in that, not in itself, but for the joy of giving eternal life to us.
 - Until our love for each other is equal to that, there is still much more for us to do.
 - Even when we have poured out our lives for others, we have still not poured them out nearly as much as we might.
 - There is no place for pride here.
- B. Paul presents himself, Timothy, and Silvanus as examples of this love.
- You see how he says, **even as we do to you**.
1. We looked at Paul’s love last week when we saw how he erupted with such joy when Timothy told him that the Thessalonians were walking with God,
- such joy that it even made his afflictions that he was bearing for the gospel easy to bear—and they were no light afflictions—
 - Paul’s love was such that he was very glad—even joyful—to be beaten up in his ministry as long as people ended up following the Lord.
 - Like Jesus, he yearned to see people in heaven.
2. Remember how I spoke to you that we have not experienced true humanity until we know depths of sorrow and the depths of joy that we experience when we care about the eternal souls of others?
- If your love only reaches to the things of this life—you do not yet know what it is to really love others.
 - No one can love unless they know Jesus Christ and have genuinely been brought into His salvation.

- Without Christ, you are living in a world that is closed off from connection with the One in whom we live and move and have our being.
 - You are like a zombie, dead to the very centre of all life.
3. Paul may be referring to his and his fellow workers example with respect to the last part of his request—
 - where he says that their love would extend not only to one another, but to all.
 - a. He is telling them that yes, they are to love one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord.
 - We should especially love those who are of the household of faith.
 - They are the special objects of Christ’s love, so they ought to be the special object of our love.
 - b. But real God-produced love will not stop there!
 - The Thessalonians knew very well that Paul and his ministry team had loved them before they had believed.
 - That is why they came, knowing that hostility would likely be their reward, to proclaim the gospel to them.
 - Did Jesus not teach us that one of the marks of genuine divine love is when we love our enemies?
 - He said that even unbelievers love those who love them, but as His people, we are called to do good to those who abuse us and to really and truly love them.
- C. The love Paul is praying for is love that must be prayed for...
1. It must be prayed for because the love he is looking for goes far beyond our ability.
 - It is not natural, but supernatural.
 - It is a love that is to take possession of our whole heart and to drive out self-love.
 2. Isn’t it a splendid thing that the true God is a God who wants us to ask Him to produce this love in His people?
 - That He is a powerful God who is *able* to produce this kind of love in us?
 - And that He is a gracious God who *wants* this kind of love in His people more than anything else?
 - that love is a summary of His whole law?
 3. What a beautiful thing it is when it starts to appear in a believer’s life!
 - a. We need to face the fact that a lack of love is the root of all our sin.
 - 1) Think about it—I am talking about the divine love that cares about other people before the true and living God—
 - a deep love that reaches to their very souls!
 - 2) Husbands, what is at the source of your neglect of your wife and children?
 - What is it that causes anger or bitterness to rise up against them?

- Oh you can tell me about all the things that they do to provoke you.
 - But the root of the problem for you is that you do not love them with this super-abounding love we are talking about.
 - You just don't—if you did, you would be very different.
- 3) And children, where does the quarrelling and contending with your brothers and sisters come from?
 - Is the problem that they are annoying? Is that really it?
 - No! The problem is that you do not love them with this super-abounding love that God gives to His people.
 - Do you even pray for them—for their growth in grace? for their prosperity? for their happiness and blessing?
 - If you loved them, you would pray for them and you seek to promote that instead of railing at them in your selfishness.
 - Too often it is selfishness and cursing that overflows instead of love.
- 4) And what about you who are struggling with giving way to your lusts and your addictions...
 - What is back of these?
 - It is a lack of love for God and for others.
 - You want to indulge your selfish cravings because you don't care about others or about what it does to your relationship with them.
 - Some of you men—you are pursuing your lusts instead of the good of your wife and children.
 - And you women, it is the same thing.
 - Your lusts are anything that you pursue instead of loving others.
 - There is no room for such things when you really love others.
- b. Let me tell you, love cannot help but act for the sake of the one it loves.
 - 1) It has to express itself in deeds of kindness and helpfulness...
 - It weeps with those who weep and it rejoices with those that rejoice.
 - And it goes to help and to serve where there are needs—it even sacrifices—not to make a show, but because it really cares!
 - 2) It is love like this that turns the world upside down.
 - In the early church, the pagans said, “Oh how they love one another.”
 - They could deny that the Son of God came in the flesh and that He rose from the dead, but they could not deny the transformed lives of His people when they super-abounded with love.
 - Such a love broke their pride.
 - They did not know how to deal with it or explain it.

TRANS> This is the love that Paul was praying for.

- This is the love that we must learn to pray for.

- And now let's look at...

III. The third thing we ought to pray for believers is that God would establish their hearts blameless in holiness before Him.

- You can see this in verse 13: **so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.**

A. This is a prayer that God will give them assurance that they are holy before Him.

1. **Establishing their hearts** means that it is settled within their heart that they really are God's people.

- He gives them confidence that they really do belong to Him.
- Their lives are holy, meaning that they are set apart to Him as their God.
 - That is what holiness refers to—being set apart to God as His servant, as His child, as His bride, as His own.
 - That they who were dead in trespasses and sins before they came to Christ are now made alive in Christ Jesus.
 - That they who were once slaves to sin are now slaves to God.
 - That they died to sin with Christ and have risen with Him to walk in newness of life by the working of the Holy Spirit.
 - that is, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.
 - Yes indeed, their heart has been circumcised to love the Lord, not by circumcision made with men's hands, but by the Spirit of God.
 - It is not circumcision or uncircumcision in the flesh that matters, but a new heart!

2. And they are said to be **blameless in holiness** before God the Father...

- Meaning that the holiness that they have been given is genuine...
 - They are blameless in it—not that it is perfect or without sin, for no one is without sin...
 - But rather that no blame can be assigned to the claim that the person is holy before God—that they really belong to Him now instead of to the devil.
- Do you see the point?
 - It is that the person really does belong to God now.
 - No one can find ground for denying that they are not a true saint, someone who truly does have new life in Christ.
 - They are blameless in holiness before God...
 - God Himself will vouch for them.

3. And this certainty that they are truly one of God's people prepares them for the return of Christ with all His saints—they are ready for Him.

- a. They do not become established when He comes,
 - but God establishes them now so that they are ready for His return.
 - It means that they are confident that they will be recognised as belonging to Jesus Christ when He returns.
- b. What a grand thing it is to have this assurance!

- It means that you can look with delight at the return of Christ.
 - You can have confidence before Him at His coming because your heart does not condemn you.
 - God has established you as one of His people—in genuine holiness—and you are ready for Him to come.
- c. Of course not everyone in the church is ready.
- There are some who are genuine believers whose hearts God has not yet established as blameless in holiness...
 - They are not sure that they are in Christ—they hope they are—but they are not sure if they know Him.
 - And there are some whose hearts are not established before God as blameless in holiness because, although they profess, they are not truly saved.
 - They say that they know Him, but they are not regenerate.
 - They are like Judas who outwardly walked with Him for a time, but are never truly sanctified.
 - The prayer of Paul here is that God would establish the Thessalonians’ hearts blameless in holiness—truly before God.
 - That is what you should pray for other Christians.
 - There are so many that are unsure of where they stand with God.
 - Pray that their hearts will be established.
- B. What does God do to establish the hearts of His people—to give them this assurance that they are truly His people?
1. He does what we saw in verse 12...
 - He makes them increase and abound in love for one another and for all men.
 - He works this super-abounding love into their lives.
 - Notice how verse 13 is linked to verse 12 by the words *so that*.
 - Paul prays that God might cause them to super-abound in love in verse 12...*so that* (v. 13) **He might establish their hearts blameless in holiness before God...**”
 - The assurance is only found where the super-abounding love is found!
 - Do you see why love must be there for assurance to be there?
 - The super-abounding love is something that only God can produce in you.
 - So when you have it, you know that He truly is at work in you!
 - Where else did this supernatural love come from if not from Him?
 - He shows you by this that you really do belong to Him.
 2. John reinforces the doctrine that God-produced love in you shows that you truly do belong to God.
 - In 1 John 3:14-15, he says: **We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.**

¹⁵ **Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

- Likewise in 1 John 3:18-19, he says: **My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.** ¹⁹ **And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.**
- God gives us assurance by putting love for one another into our hearts.

C. Having this assurance is something greatly to be desired!

1. What insecurity there is if you are facing the coming of Christ with no assurance that you truly do know Him.

- Jesus Himself urges us to be prepared for His return.
- He tells parables like the parable of the ten virgins where five of them were prepared and five were not prepared.
 - And when the bridegroom came, five went to join the wedding feast and the other five were locked out.
 - They did not get to go with the rest of the church to be His bride.

➤ So what can you do to prepare?

2. Come to Jesus for eternal life and you will be prepared...

- He has shed His blood to atone for His people's sins, and if you come to Him believing in Him for eternal life, you will have full forgiveness of sins.
- And not only that, but Jesus has also procured righteousness for all of His people (the whole church) by living a godly life as our representative.
 - The whole church is accepted because of His godly life.
 - You will be credited with His righteousness if you come to Him for life.
- But when you come to Him, there is something else that He always does.
 - He does not give you eternal life without giving you new life.
 - He gives you His Spirit and the Spirit gives you a new heart so that you will live for God and live for Christ.
 - And the great work of the Spirit is this super-abounding love that Paul is praying for.
 - When you have that, it gives you clear evidence that you really do know Him—it assures your heart before Him.
 - God establish your heart blameless in holiness before Him.
 - You are accepted of God because of Jesus, but the evidence that you are accepted is the new life of love that He gives you.

Conclusion:

So you see what our Father has given to us in this passage.

- He has given us Paul's testimony of his prayer for the Thessalonians so that we might know what to pray for one another...
 - That God would bring the ministry of the Word to us...
 - That God would cause love to increase and abound in us...

- And that He would make that love abound so that we might have confidence that we truly do belong to Him that we might be ready for His coming.
- Seek these things from God for yourself and for others.