**Faith in Uncertain Times - Part 9**

**Congregational Life (part 2) - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28**

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – March 21st, 2021

**Intro:**

* This morning we are concluding the first half of our series in the letters of Thessalonians by spending time learning from the word of God from the last lines of the first letter. Then we will pause for Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter and then resume our series in the second letter to the Thessalonians.
* Paul's letters follow a general pattern of telling us what is true, and then what to do. We are in the section of "what to do" of this letter when it comes to life together as a congregation. Last week, if you recall, we were told to make sure we "get on board" the three ships that would move us forward as a church: leadership and fellowship. I encourage you to go back and look at the notes because by now, more than likely, you have forgotten what was said, perhaps besides my outstanding jokes.
* Today we are focusing on the last of our three ships: worship. Being "onboard," we need to know what to do. God, in His grace, tells us His will for personal worship, His way in congregational worship, His work of personal redemption, and His warmth in congregational connection.
* If our ultimate goal as Christians is to please God, it is helpful for us to know what is true and what to do. Worship plays a big part in our lives as we relate to the living God. And we are called to be "living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is our spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1).

But the trouble with living sacrifices is they crawl off the altar. Dying for the faith is, in some ways, easier than living in the faith. Today, God offers us help and hope in our worship by telling us what to do and also what He is doing.

**God's will for personal worship**

**1 Thess 5:16-18 NIV**

**Rejoice always; 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

* If you want to memorize some verses, these are good ones to do so. They are short, and they give guidance. We have these verses hanging above the fireplace in our house (show slide). It is good for us to remind ourselves what we are to do.
* At first glance, these verses seem impossible for us to do. Rejoice *always?* Pray *continually?* Give thanks *in all circumstances?* Let's take a deeper look at each one of these things, so we can have a better understanding of what is being asked of us.
* *Rejoice always* – the same Bible that tells us to "rejoice always" also tells us "there is a season for everything," including "a time to weep and a time to mourn" (Ecc. 3:1,4). It tells us to "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15), and at times we are to "grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom" (James 4:9). Does the Bible contradict itself? How are we to both "mourn" and "rejoice"? As people of faith, we can do this **because our lives are built upon what is eternally true, while our lives are lived within what is temporarily true**. This is why Paul can say:

**2 Cor 4:8-9 NIV**

**We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.**

* We worship because we have faith, and our faith is built upon the rock of the promises of Christ, and because we have these promises, we always have reason to rejoice.
* *Pray continually* - Can you literally pray 24/7? The answer is "no." We do have to sleep, and our mind often needs to focus on other things. Can we pray "continually?" The answer is "yes." So, what does that look like? This means that throughout the day, we are continually connecting with our heavenly Father through prayer. That prayer is not regulated to before mealtime or bedtime or for Sundays. This means that we are turning to God regularly and continually throughout the day. It is like an ongoing relationship (Ill. of relationship with wife).
* We are told to "ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking" (Matt. 7:7-11). We do this because we have faith, that there is a God and He hears us, that we have a relationship with him, and that in Him is the power to change anything and reach anywhere. Our prayer is worship because we acknowledge there is one greater than us, and we turn to Him for what we need. We give him the desires of our heart, and we look to Him as our source of all that is good. The more you know Him, the more you want to connect with Him, the more you connect with Him, the more you want to know Him. The more you know Him, the more you become like Him.
* *Give thanks in all circumstances* – which means we are to thank God in both our good and difficult circumstances. Notice that this is not "give thanks *for* all circumstances" but "*in* all circumstances." This is not easy to do, especially for those who, when given a donut, focus on the hole vs. being thankful that you have a donut. Thankfulness and gratitude are an intentional choice, and it takes grace and trust to choose thankfulness. Thankfulness is a key measurement in knowing your spiritual health (Ill. RRM Counselor).
* Sometimes it is impossible for us to give thanks in all circumstances, and we need to ask for the grace to see what He is doing through and in hardship. The pilgrims who gave us the national holiday of Thanksgiving dug 7 graves for every house they built. I would encourage you to ask God to grant you the grace to see what He is doing, and to see things to be grateful for. If you do, the load will become lighter, the day will become brighter.
* Christians worship by having an underlying joy. Christians worship by being in continual prayer. Christians worship by being grateful people.

**God's way in congregational worship**

**1 Thess 5:19-22 NIV**

**Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; Hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil.**

* In congregational worship, we are told not to "quench the Spirit" – this means not to "extinguish" the flame of the Spirit in our worship together. Often in scripture, the HS is connected to flame or fire. For instance, on the day of Pentecost, **"they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (Acts 2:3-4 NIV).** We can extinguish the heat, light, and power of the Spirit by resisting Him when we are together. We harden our hearts toward Him and others by not being convicted. We will not listen to the word when it is being presented. We will not move when we are being prompted. We just don't respond and would rather remain as we are where we are. This grieves the Holy Spirit himself and limits His work among us.
* We need to pray that we will be sensitive and welcoming to the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our services. This means we may need to be flexible to what we are doing and change our plans sometimes as the Spirit moves us. We need to listen to His voice speaking to us and pay attention to what he is doing. We need a greater presence and a greater response to Him.
* Paul puts two "do not" instructions together. Do not quench the Spirit, and do not treat prophecies with contempt. I grew up in the charismatic movement, and I have heard and read a lot of prophecies. I have seen them have powerful positive effects, and I have also seen them damage others and destroy the faith of some.
* Because of the damage I have seen and the number of prophecies that did not come true, I have become fairly skeptical of them, and perhaps you have as well. This verse helps me not to "treat them with contempt" and to "hold the door of my heart" open to them and pay attention to what the HS may be speaking to my life and to us.
* Now, on the other hand, in dealing with a prophecy or what we believe to be a direct word of the Lord, we need to "test" it to see if it is truly of the Lord or not. In this test, we are to hold onto what is good and let go of what is not good. (Apparently, there was someone who "prophesied" in Thessalonica that the "day of the Lord" had already come.) We test these things by the truth of the word, if it does not line up with the word, it is to be discarded. And we test these things by the truth of reality. If it does not line up with reality, it must be discarded as well. It is a testing of both the root and the fruit, and if this is founded on the word of God and what comes from it.
* We are also told to "reject" any kind of evil. And this can come in many forms, from doctrines taught by men or wisdom that is demonic (see Matt. 15:7, James 3:5). Any other form of evil, from attention-grabbing, lying, to anger and hatred, etc. We will choose not to participate in or with them.

**God's work of personal redemption**

**1 Thess 5:23-24 NIV**

**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.**

* Notice who is doing the work in our lives and in our midst. In our worship, He is working. May God Himself – the God of Peace – sanctify you through and through. He is the one who sanctifies – He does this as a process – through and through. He is the one who justifies – may your whole spirit and body be kept blameless. He is the one who glorifies – at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you - this is what you are called to, He is faithful, and He will do it.
* You are not your own redeemer; apart from Him, we can do nothing. Invite Him into every aspect of your life. Trust yourself to Him and let Him do His work in you and through you. God is working among us in our worship to conform us into the image of His Son, for His name sake and our satisfaction.

**God's warmth in congregational connection**

**1 Thess 5:25-28 NIV**

**Brothers and sisters, pray for us. 26 Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**

* The warmth of God draws us together; we love because He first loved us. God draws us together through prayer- *brothers and sisters pray for us* – prayer reaches everywhere and anywhere, and we are drawn together through it. God draws us together through love – *greet all God's people with a holy kiss.* In order to do this, we need to be close to each other, not just physically close, but relationally close; this is an expression of community and connection, of love and security. God draws us together through His word – *have this letter read to all the brothers* – in reading and coming around the word of God, we draw closer to God, but we also draw closer to each other. We learn the same things, and value the same things, and in so doing become more like Him and more like each other. This is all God's grace to us.

**Conclusion**

* So again, let us be a congregation that grows in the grace of the Lord, for each other, and for our community. Let His grace be evident in our meetings in our lives.
* Now you know what to aim for in your private worship. Remind yourself to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances because this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.
* Remember to be open to the moving of the Holy Spirit, that you will be sensitive to Him and open to His word in your heart. Remember to test what you hear against the word and against reality.
* Remember that God is working in and through you. He is faithful, and He will do it. Rest in the faithfulness of His grace and His work. May this knowledge give you peace and put you at rest.
* Remember that God is bringing us together because of His great love. Warmly pray for each other, warmly embrace each other, warmly gather around the word together. And the grace of God will be evident to all and through all, and God will be glorified, and we will be satisfied in Him.
* Prayer