

Day 65, 2 Thessalonians 3

by David Servant

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians emphasizes the importance of prayer, hard work, and self-sufficiency, while also providing guidelines for charity and support.

Scripture: Matthew 24:31, Acts 20:34, Philippians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 3:1, 1 Timothy 5:6, 2 Timothy 3:10, 2 Timothy 4:18

Topics: "Prayer Power", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

David Servant preaches on the power of prayer for evangelists, apostles, and missionaries, emphasizing Paul's belief in the impact of believers' prayers on his deliverance from persecution and evil men. Paul's life exemplified perseverance through trials, trusting in the Lord's deliverance even in martyrdom. He also addresses the importance of not being a burden to others, highlighting the balance between meeting needs and avoiding laziness. Paul's teachings on charity towards widows underscore the need for discernment in helping those truly in need. The sermon concludes with a focus on the principle of discipleship and the value of hard work, even for pastors serving small congregations.

Transcript

If you've ever wondered what is a good way to pray for evangelists, apostles, and missionaries, today's reading offers some insight. Paul requested prayer "that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified...and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men" (3:1-2). Similarly, from a prison cell in Rome, Paul would later write, "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). Paul believed that the prayers of God's people could make a difference in his circumstances.

Although he certainly had his share of persecution, prison time, and death plots, the Lord faithfully delivered Paul every time---at least until his martyrdom. Near the end of his life he would write to Timothy:

But you followed my...perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! (2 Tim. 3:10-11).

In a sense, even martyrdom is not a failure on God's part to provide deliverance. It is the ultimate deliverance, as Paul would confess in that same letter to Timothy:

The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever (2 Tim. 4:18).

The worst thing anyone can do to us is send us to heaven sooner than we expected! So never forget that if God wants you alive, no person can kill you. And if He wants you dead, no person can keep you alive. We're in His hands!

Apparently, a problem that Paul addressed in his first letter still persisted among the Thessalonian believers. Some in the church were sponging off of others, a phenomenon that soon surfaces whenever charity is available. To love our neighbors as ourselves certainly includes meeting the pressing needs of fellow believers; in fact, our very salvation is authenticated by such acts of mercy (see Matt 24:31-46). On the other hand, to love our neighbors as ourselves also includes not being a burden to others, expecting them to meet our needs from their labor. Laziness and sponging off of others is a sign of selfishness. Thus, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (3:10)

For this reason, we must be careful that our kindness doesn't enable laziness or empower irresponsibility. Rather, we should focus on meeting the needs of those who cannot provide for themselves, such as widows and orphans.

I am not, however, speaking of wealthy widows or well-off orphans in Western nations, but of those in poorer places who have no one to care for them. Yet even compassion for poor widows can result in fostering laziness in widows who can work or serve. Paul would later write guidelines for charity towards widows that clearly addressed that very issue. No widow who "gives herself to wanton pleasure" should be supported by the church (1 Tim. 5:6). Only those widows who "continue in entreaties and prayers night and day" and who are "devoted...to every good work" are worthy of assistance (1 Tim. 5:5, 10).

Finally, notice how often the principle of discipleship is subtly mentioned today. Paul and his companions had set a good example before the Thessalonians of leading disciplined lives, working hard to provide for their own needs so as not to be a burden to anyone (3:7-9). Paul's life was his greatest sermon.

One final thought: Pastors who must work "secular" jobs to support themselves because they serve small flocks are often looked upon as lesser pastors, but as we have just read, they have a biblical precedent. Similarly, Paul told the pastors/elders in Ephesus, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:34-35). God bless all the hard-working pastors of little flocks!

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