

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Take a Stand 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 Part 3**

Paul had become separated from the Thessalonian Church. He had been unable to return to them because of Satanic opposition. But he was still extremely concerned about how they were doing. He had seen them spiritually born, he had been involved in personally nurturing the church, but he had not been privileged to see them stand. He had not been able to see them successfully stand in the midst of tribulation and trial.

Paul wanted to help know about how they were doing. Paul wanted to help them and assist them in standing strong in the Lord in the midst of difficult times. Being unable to get there himself he actively was able to assist them in two different ways.

He ministered to them by sending a helper (VV. 1-10) He sent Timothy to them. Even though this left him alone in Athens, yet he was willing to do this. Not because it was best for him, but rather it was best for the Thessalonians. Timothy returned to give Paul an excellent report and he was ecstatic. All of this we have considered in **VV. 1-10**. But Paul is not done ministering to the Thessalonians there was more to be done. Much more to be done.

He prayed for them (VV. 11-13) **“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; (12) and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; (13) so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”**

We cannot minimize the importance of prayer in our being able to stand against the world the flesh and the devil. Do you remember the story of Christ and His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane? I would like to read that for you. **Luke 22:39-46 “And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. (40) And when He arrived at the lace, He said to them, “pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (41) And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, (42) saying “Father, if you art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.” (43) Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. (44) And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. (45) And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, (46) And said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”** If we are going to stand in the midst of tribulation and trial we must commit ourselves to prayer. Certainly in the midst of Christ’s greatest trial we find him praying and the Lord responded by sending an angel to minister to him. But the disciples in spite of Christ’s exhortations failed to pray and they failed to stand against the temptations that would come upon them. We cannot minimize the power of prayer in regard to ourselves for others.

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Most of you are familiar with **Eph. 6** and Paul's discourse on the armor of God. And we find INTERCESSORY prayer as a very prominent part in this discourse. But not as a specific piece of armor but rather as that activity which is able to extend Christ's victory even beyond our individual life to the life of the whole church. **Eph. 6:18** **“with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints”** Paul had his armor on in Athens but he not only wanted to enjoy the victory personally, but extend it all the way to Thessalonica and he is compelled to intercede for them.

Paul prayed three specific and precise prayers.

### HE PRAYED THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO COME TO THE THESSALONIANS (V. 11)

In **VV. 9-10** Paul had told the Thessalonians that he had been praying for them. He had told them that he was most earnestly praying for them. He had told them that he was most earnestly praying for them night and day. He had told them that he was most earnestly praying for them night and day that he might see their face and complete what is lacking in their faith. Those are very impressive statements but are they true?

It seems to me that people sometimes use the expression “I have been praying for you” very loosely. They are not communicating so much by this statement that they have actually been praying for someone as much as they are communicating by this statement that they have been thinking about someone. Praying about someone and thinking about someone are two totally different things.

Though it may be true that people in America sometimes get thinking about someone confused with praying for someone this certainly could not be said of Paul. After having shared with the Thessalonians the fact that he had been praying for them he breaks out in the prayer that we are examining this morning.

Let us read **1 Thess. 3:11** **“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you.”** Paul told the Thessalonians that he had been praying that he might see their face. And he now in **V. 11** punctuates that statement with an actual prayer for that very thing.

I would like you to notice who Paul addresses in this prayer. He says, **“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you.”** He begins by addressing **“God and Father”** and then he couples this with **“Jesus our Lord.”** Nowhere more plainly than in these early Christian prayers do we see how high a status Jesus had in the minds of his followers. People like Paul were nurtured on the truth that there is one God (Deut. 6:4) Without ceasing to believe that truth, they now prayed to God as Father and Son.

Paul was unceasingly praying that he might be able to get to the Thessalonians. This desire to be with believers who share the same passions, the same desires, the same goals, the same struggles I believe is natural. This desire to be with believers not only to be encouraged but to be an encouragement is healthy.

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For those of you who may be here this morning who are having difficulty getting to the services regularly. Who may be having difficulty getting to Bible study groups. For whatever reason. What should be your prayer? Lord help me to get to church this Saturday night. Lord help me to get to church this Sunday morning. Lord help me to get to the Bible study group. If you are finding yourself having very little desire to be around the church and church people don't blame the church, the problem is most likely within yourself. Confess it!

Paul did not have this problem. But for all His praying he was totally stymied. Satan had continued to thwart Paul as we learned in **1 Thess. 2:18**. What was the problem? Why weren't Paul's prayers being answered? Was it because God was not able? Certainly this is not true.

Let us consider Abraham for a moment. How did God introduce himself to a 99 year old Abram when he again approached him about the prospects of having a son in **Gen. 17:1**? Does he come to Abraham and say to him "I am God a pretty strong guy?" "I am God and I have a lot of power." "I am God and I can do most everything that I set my mind to." He doesn't say any of these things, rather he introduces himself as "**GOD ALMIGHTY.**" God possesses all might. God possesses all power. Certainly Satan could not thwart Paul from coming to the Thessalonians unless God Himself permitted it.

Certainly Paul believed this and that is why he continued to pray to Him. He knew that if God were to will it so he could easily get to Thessalonica. He, therefore believing this, would turn his thoughts about the Thessalonians into prayers. He would take his desires about seeing the Thessalonians and turn them into worshipful and respectful requests. And it just so happened that he was thinking about them so often he was able to say that he was praying for them day and night.

Did the Lord answer these prayers? And the answer appears to be yes. In Acts 19:25 on his third missionary journey he went through Macedonia some five years later.

As long as we are thinking about certain people we are to continue to pray for those people no matter how long those prayers may not have been answered. I can honestly tell you this evening I am praying for you day and night. You are continually on my mind. I am not always but frequently turning those thoughts into prayers. My goal is to turn more and more of my thoughts concerning people in prayers. And even if certain of those prayers are requests and even if certain of those requests are not immediately granted by the Lord I will continue to pray them. How could I do anything less.

A passage of scripture that continues to challenge me is the statement of Samuel in **1 Sam. 12:23** "**Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.**" This is my prayer this morning. And I know that in order to not fail you I must be consistently turning those thoughts into prayers.

What are you thinking about this morning? What is on your mind? Let us follow in the footsteps of Paul and stop thinking about it and start praying about it. And keep praying about it until the Lord answers it or we cease thinking about it. My hope is that those thoughts will be more and more concerned with people rather than circumstances.

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Paul's first request in this prayer is that the Lord might direct "his path" and the path of "his companions to them." What else does Paul pray for?

### HE PRAYED THAT THEIR LOVE MIGHT INCREASE AND ABOUND (V.12)

Let us read **V. 12** "**and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you.....**" Notice that Paul is asking the Lord to "**increase and abound in love.**" In **1 Thess. 1:3** Paul has already acknowledged that he was thanking the Lord for the "**labor of love.**" These Thessalonians were already a loving fellowship.

But Paul was not satisfied, he wanted them to increase and abound in love even more. He wanted their love to increase and abound still more for "**one another**" and "**for all men just as we also do for you.**"

Did God answer this prayer? **2 Thess. 1:3** "**We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.**"

We need to understand the importance of never feeling satisfied with ourselves. Hopefully all of us here this morning can thank the Lord for bringing us to Christ and causing us to grow in him but certainly none of us have "arrived."

As I look at our own fellowship I can say with Paul I thank the Lord for your labor of love. We have a fellowship that I really do believe evidences the Love of Christ but there is more to be done. We can increase and abound still more.

As I look at this fellowship there are things that I would like to see in greater abundance.

I would like to see a greater willingness to discipline our lifestyles that we might get to services earlier to reach out to greet the brethren especially those who are visiting our fellowship. I believe that we have much room to grow in this area.

I would like to see a greater willingness to open our homes for ministry both for the church family and for the community. I believe that we have much room to grow in this area.

I would like to see a greater willingness to discipline our consumption of the things of this world in order to support the ministries and the mission of this church. I would like to see a greater willingness to discipline our consumption to help and assist those who are in need. I believe that we have much room to grow in this area.

I would like to see a greater toleration and growing appreciation for those who give themselves in ministry. Whether they are in childrens ministry, youth ministry or adult ministry.

We have done well in loving and we have more that can be done. We have only begun to grow. The Thessalonians had only begun to grow. They had not yet arrived. We have not arrived.

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But God is faithful. The scriptures tell us that we are “**taught of God to love one another**” (1 **Thess. 4:9**). But don’t think that this process will be painless. Some of these lessons are best learned in the school of suffering. Joseph suffered for thirteen years because of his brothers envy and persecution. Yet he learned to love them in spite of their hatred. The Jewish legalists persecuted Paul from city to city, yet Paul so loved his people that he willingly would have died for them (**Rom. 9:1-3**).

In praying for increasing and abounding love we should recognize that love is particularly strengthened and manifested in times of difficulty. Praying for increasing and abounding love is like praying for patience. What is Paul’s third request for the Thessalonians?

HE PRAYED THAT THE LORD MIGHT ESTABLISH THEIR HEARTS UNBLAMABLE IN HOLINESS.

Let us read V. 13 “**so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.**” He prayed for their personal holiness.

Notice the words “so that.” Love is the foundation of holiness. It is only as we give ourselves up for the sake of the Lord and others out of love that we can live holy lives.

In Christ believers are already holy in terms of status. God accepts them as blameless. **1 Cor. 1:30** “**But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.**” But this prayer does not deal with the status, but rather with our practice. Our practice should match our status. We are to become what we are. But we will not become what we are unless we learn to love.

The goal that he presents to us is that we might achieve this standard by the time we stand before Jesus coming or PAROUSIA. “**So that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus.**” Jesus is coming any time to catch up his church to himself. This hope is a very purifying hope. In **1 John 3:2-3** it says, “**See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure.**”

Knowing this. Knowing that it is the expectation of seeing Jesus face to face that is a strong motivation for living pure lives, I believe that the appearing that is being spoken of here is the coming of Christ for his saints.

Some of you who are particularly observant might notice that this is not what the passage reads. Rather it reads, “**So that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus WITH ALL HIS SAINTS RATHER THAN FOR ALL HIS SAINTS.** I believe that this is cleared up by understanding that this could also be read “with all his holy ones.” And this is exactly how the New International Version translates it and I

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prefer that reading. I believe that “holy ones” is not referring to church saints but to the angels who will accompany Jesus at His coming for the church and will be present at the Bema seat of Christ.

### CONCLUSION

Paul wanted to know how the Thessalonians were doing. Paul wanted to continue to be a part of their lives and their growth. In order to minister to them though being unable to personally be with them he sent them a helper Timothy. And he also committed himself to pray for them.

THAT HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO COME TO THEM.

THAT THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO GROW IN LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND FOR ALL MEN.

THAT THEIR HEARTS MIGHT BE ESTABLISHED UNBLAMABLE IN HOLINESS.

We need to pray for one another. We need to pray as we think about various people. We need to pray for their growth in love and holiness. We need to be faithful intercessors.