

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

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[0 : 00] from the book of 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 1 through 5. This can be found in the White Bibles on page 1093. Again, the scripture text is 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 1 through 5, on page 1093 of the White Bibles.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.

For not all have faith, but the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. Well, good morning, and let me add my own welcome to you on this Memorial Day weekend.

[1 : 25] What a wonderful thing to be able to gather together. And I am always praying that this hour and a half that we spend together will become, over time, not only the ballast for our life, but the highlight of our week.

That we would realize that the Lord gave us Sundays, one in seven, because he would know that we needed to be replenished in our love and faith and commitment to him.

And so it is my hope that you are learning week by week the love of God, the reorientation of your soul toward him, and your care for one another.

I've been struck in this short letter with the conversational and relational intimacy that exists between Paul and this church in Thessalonica.

Both letters, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, present themselves to us with Paul and the people.

[2 : 57] They're short. But we get a glimpse of a church planter and the congregation that he planted.

And it's much more intimate than merely thinking about the distinctions one has regarding the relationship of a pulpit and a pew.

There's a conversational, relational intimacy in play. Even the way the letter started struck me.

It's just Paul and Silvanus and Timothy. It's not Paul the Apostle. Paul by the will and command of God.

It bears the markings of a personal exchange. And I've wondered today what we can learn from these five verses that would inform the life of this congregation.

[4 : 14] What does a healthy, happy church look like when one considers a pastor and a people? What should a pastor really desire from his people?

What would a good pastor reveal concerning his beliefs about his people?

What's the heart of a pastor for his people? All these things are really important in the day in which we live. It doesn't take long to look at the church in America or even the Chicago area and see the persistent unhealthy patterns in play in spiritual organizations or ministries.

The abuse of position. The misuse of power.

The selfishness that is in play. And the unwinding, really, of a congregation as a result.

[5 : 45] What can we learn when we see what Paul wants for himself? What can we learn when we see the confidence Paul has in them?

What can we learn concerning how Paul prays for them? Take a look at 3.1. That opening word looks so technical, but it's actually quite conversational.

Finally, brothers. I mean, when you read it, you might think, okay, he's coming to a close of his letter now. He's introduced the conclusion of a discourse. That's not the way it's actually taken.

He's just finished unfolding his concern for them, given the news that they had heard, false news, received about the second coming of the Lord.

And so he's speaking here finally, almost the way you do when you say, so, or well, or you pause in a conversation and you say, now, now, now, all right, let's move to something else.

[7 : 04] That's the sense here. Finally, so given that my concern for you has been laid down, given that my affirmation of you has been put forward, let me move in my relational discourse with you to something else.

Finally, brothers and sisters, and look what's here. Pray for us. I mean, it's emphatic in the text.

Pray for us. This is what Paul, the pastor, wants from them. Prayer.

Interestingly, it's the first time in the letter that he's taken his eyes off of their needs to consider his own. And he does so for only a couple of verses.

And it's interesting that his request is for prayer. This is what the pastor desires from them.

[8 : 21] He doesn't mention anything material. He doesn't tell them that he needs them to commit to some great work.

And interestingly, his demeanor, as soon as he wants prayer for himself, actually isn't concerning himself.

This is wonderfully instructive. What does Paul want from his people, and what can we learn from it? Paul wants prayer from them.

Along two lines. First, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you. So even when you're praying, Paul says, for me, the thing that's foremost in his mind is that, not anything concerning him, but that the message that's preached by him would be speeding along.

It's a wonderful idea. The word of the Lord running. That's what he wants.

[9 : 40] Please pray for me, says Paul, that the message I'm proclaiming would be running.

It would be taking ground. It would be covering territory. Some people think he's meditating on the verses that the Allisons actually picked up on today in their congregational prayer, Psalm 19, where you have this notion of the words of creation going forth like speech.

He says, The word goes through all the earth, the words to the end of the world. In them he is set for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, like a strong man running its course with joy.

This speech that is triumphantly moving. Some people think he's actually drawing on Psalm 147, where he says that the Lord sends out his command to the earth.

His word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool. He scatters frost like ashes. This is Paul's request. Now, this is informative for us because this is what my heart's prayer would be for you as you pray for me.

[11 : 20] That the word would be running. And if you're looking for metaphors or analogies, those two moments in the Psalms are really wonderful.

I've been thinking about them this week. Imagine the word traveling as the bridegroom leaving his chamber joyously on his way to the wedding.

I've stood in the back of many churches over 31 years of ministry as we prepare groomsmen and pastor presiding to walk out.

And there's nerves. There's a sense of guys pushing the bridegroom on the shoulder. There's often prayers. There's humor.

But there is then that moment where the bridegroom himself is just locked in. And I always smile because the door is going to open and they're going to process out.

[12 : 36] And he is going to see his bride come down the aisle. And he leads forth with eagerness, expectation, anticipation.

Paul says, when you pray for me, pray that the message I'm delivering will be like that man waiting to see what life will unfold.

It's a beautiful image. Or he says like a strong man running its course. And it's the image of the sun. Pray that the word from Holy Trinity Church and the message that's moving would be like that daily journey of a sun who's strong and rising and swift in moving east to west over and over and over again.

Covering ground. Now early. Now high overhead. Before I knew it. Setting. I want the word to move. I want Jesus to be known. I want Him to go from east to west. That's what you should be praying. Praying. Think of the analogies from Psalm 147.

[14:01] Pray that the word from this pulpit would be like a courier who had been given the command of a king and his role was to run that word to the end of the realm.

You could just see him setting off. We watch 40 some thousand every fall take over the city on that marathon race.

And there is nothing like that first group off the line. I've never run a marathon. I never planned to run a marathon. I won't run a marathon.

You could give me \$100,000. I will not run the marathon. I will die happy without ever doing the 26.2 sticker on the back of my car.

I'll get a tattoo before I run a marathon. But there's something about tuning into that thing and watching those first lean, mean, strong runners go.

[15:21] They just go. To me, it is as though they sprint for 26 miles. This is what Paul is indicating when he wants the word running swiftly.

He wants everyone who goes to a Christian church, when they have their daily prayers, and they think of their pastor who they normally pray, Lord, help him.

They should immediately think, Lord, may that word be like that runner off that line that immediately separates himself or herself from the field.

That's what we really ought to be wanting. Or, from Psalm 147, the image is of ash as it's blown. I mean, just think of picking up ash to the wind or just just just fast dispersion.

[16:36] Or, it says like, snow. You've been outside, haven't you? You're Midwesterners. When you when you begin to shovel, or better yet, if you have someone shoveling for you, and you've seen the snowfall with such swiftness and such speed that by the time the walkways are done, a half an inch is already back on the ground.

Paul says, pray like that. Pray that the word would be stacking up like snow as though we can't really keep up with it. This is his request.

And that it would be honored as it was among them. This is really the first indication that as that word goes, it might have been more substantial in Thessalonica than we think.

We tend to think very few people believe, very few people came to faith, but there's some indication that in Thessalonica, there was a swift, swift, fast, immediate, revival-like movement of the gospel that was embraced by people.

I mean, they said he's turned the whole world upside down and he came here. Whatever happened in Thessalonica was so strong that it caused a civic disturbance. Now imagine what it would be to be in Chicago, in Hyde Park, and in Woodlawn, or on the south side, and to have the word so rapidly moving into the hearts of men and women and children that it caused a civic disturbance.

[18:16] Like, what is happening here? There's numerical growth. There's conversational growth. There's baptisms upon baptisms upon baptisms.

There's another who's come to believe. And then in spades, and then they pile up on each other. Paul is saying, that's it.

Let me put it to you this way. We have just purchased a building in Woodlawn. The Lord has purchased a building on our behalf. And the seating on the floor alone is 750 people.

And you can look at that and go, we're not ready for that. Or you can look at that and go, well, I hope that's enough seats if the word really is going to go.

I don't know what the Lord's going to do. But we should have a belief that the gospel is growing and a commitment in our life, not to our own welfare, but to the fast movement of the word in the city of Chicago.

[19:31] That should be our desire. That should be what puts me on my knees. Lord, bring more people to know you while it comes. And it's interesting that this is his request immediately on settling the question of whether Jesus has already come.

That he has not come. You know he hasn't come for two reasons as TJ preached last week. He hasn't come because the man of lawlessness has not been revealed.

And he hasn't come because lawlessness is still at work. When he comes, do you think lawlessness is going to be at work? And so then he says immediately pray that the gospel will just move.

This ought to inform your prayers. What Paul wants from his people ought to inform your prayers. And it ought to be honored, it says.

That the word would be honored. It's an interesting phrase. This book is repeatedly denigrated within and without the church.

[20 : 43] The word of Jesus goes through the mud. And he goes, I want it to be honored. Now that doesn't just mean, you know, don't write it in or something.

He means that it would be cherished. That it would be obeyed. That it would be lived out. That we would actually be a people who are trying to live under all that we can understand it to teach. That our lives would be transformed by this word. And then the second request, because I spent a lot of time on that, he says, this one's more akin to himself.

This is what he wants from them. That we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. It's almost, it's almost the language of the Lord's Prayer.

Deliver us from evil. It's almost as though Paul says, while I'm doing this message about Jesus, and I'm going to do it everywhere I can, and I'm going to speak to as many as I can from the scriptures about the gospel.

[22 : 02] Pray that it takes root and takes root quickly. And by the way, pray that I don't get overrun, he says, by wicked and evil men. Deliver us from evil.

This is the need that every person who believes in Christ should be praying for. We should be praying that the church would not be overrun and her ministers would not be overrun by wicked and evil men.

There, according to Paul, were people that were out to do him harm. There are people that were out to undo him. He speaks of one named Alexander who did me great harm.

We tend to forget that this is the need of the preacher, teacher, dear Lord, deliver those people who are doing this word thing regularly from wicked and evil men.

Now what's happening in the church today is it isn't even necessarily wicked and evil men that are undoing preachers and teachers. There's just self-inflicted, there's a self-inflicted undoingness at work in the church.

[23 : 15] We don't need any wicked and evil men that might be undoing the preachers. The men undo themselves! Abuse of power, sexual indiscretion, laziness at heart.

Oh, that we would get back to a day where this was the chief concern. Prayers from them and he moves in the text to the confidence that he has concerning what the Lord will do in them.

This is great because it kind of moves from a focus on Paul to a focus on the people. He closed down verse 2 by saying for not all have faith but then he says faithful is the Lord and it's actually framed that way.

Not everyone has faith. Faithful is the Lord. This is a fascinating transition. He almost catches himself to saying you know enough about me. Enough about me.

Let's get back to you. Faithful is the Lord and he will establish you. That's the surprise of the verse. You expect him to say but faithful is the Lord and he will establish me. But he doesn't.

[24 : 31] He now switches. His mind is already back upon them. Faithful is the Lord and he will establish you and he will guard you against the evil one. Pray that I'm protected from evil men.

By the way enough on me. I am confident that the Lord will keep you from evil. This beautiful his heart his heart just rolls from himself back to them.

He's not a pulpiteer who has 30 illustrations on a Sunday concerning himself. He's mentioned one thing concerning himself and then his mind is back on the people.

It's wonderful. The Lord is faithful. Look at the Lord. The Lord is faithful.

Or look at verse 4. We have confidence in the Lord. He is confident that the Lord is at work in them.

[25 : 32] Well, what is he confident in? That the Lord will establish them. This is a wonderful word. It almost is the word you get in classical Greek for a buttress.

Think of Notre Dame. Think of those flying buttresses that strengthen and support a structure. That's what he wants.

And I love the way it plays off of the idea of the word. Pray that the word will be running wildly through the world and as it does it will establish people to stand firm.

Isn't that great? The word goes and you can stand straight. And he's confident of that. It's not that he, the pastor, is doing anything.

The Lord is faithful to strengthen you, to buttress you, to support you. That's what he's confident in. And that's what every pastor ought to be confident in, in their own work, is that the Lord is at work in this work.

[26 : 42] That's why it's not inappropriate sometimes if I say to you, how you doing? And you just look at me and say, I'm still standing. See, that's this word.

The Lord, the Lord, I'm still standing. The Lord is establishing me. He's leaning in on me. I know I'm supposed to lean in on the Lord, but the Lord, he's like a buttress.

He's leaning in on me and guarding me. He's protecting me.

He's keeping me. I used to live a life where I wandered and went wherever my desires wanted. to go, but no longer.

Why? Because the Lord has put me straight, made me immovable, turning no longer to the left or to the right, and as he buttresses me, he has protected me.

[27 : 43] This is Paul's confidence. God will do this. And then verse 4, we have confidence in the Lord about you that you are doing and will do the things that we command.

This is really interesting. We'll hear more about it next week because that word command is going to come up in 6 and following. but his command is unlike any other pastoral command.

Paul's command is an apostolic command. So we're going to let him have his day next week. But what he was confident in is that they would keep doing and living the way the message asked them to live.

and that the Lord would be at work in them. So this text is beautiful. Paul requests prayers from them.

Paul reveals the confidence he has that the Lord is at work in them. And then he swings back to verse 5 and you begin to see now his prayers for them.

[28 : 49] This is wonderful. I mean this is you may not like Paul sometimes but if he was your pastor he would have loved him. Because this is the way he prayed for his people.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Two things. Paul got on his knees when he thought of his congregation in Thessalonica he said oh Lord direct their hearts first to the love of God and then to the steadfastness of Christ.

Now how you take that word of is important. Is he saying here direct their hearts to be loving toward God? That they would love God?

The love of God? Or is he saying direct their hearts to God's love of them? It's probably the latter.

That he's saying Lord when my people says Paul are Monday to Friday I want them in their heart their will their mind I want them thinking about how much you love them.

This is fascinating isn't it? He doesn't say I want them thinking that they can bear up. He said no I want them to think about God's love for them because he knows that if they think about God's love for them it will continue to produce in them all the things that God needs from them and has for them.

[30 : 27] And he wants them thinking about the steadfastness of Christ. How much of this week are you doing that? This is what I going to be! praying for you this week that you would be considering the steadfastness of Christ that you would be thinking about Christ's persevering obedience that you would be remembering his steadfast purpose for you because as you see his steadfastness for you you will willingly want to continue enduring anything and everything for him.

See this is this is parental language I told you that this whole text is conversationally relationally intimate when Paul thought of himself in the first letter he said he thought of himself as a mother and a father but not just a mother and a father it was a nursing mother and a father with children and this is his paternal prayer for the welfare of his people this is the benediction this is what he wanted them as he saw their backs leaving on a Sunday scattered into their neighborhoods with all of their individual problems with all of their commitments with all the things he knew they had to be doing his prayers were falling behind them lord may they think about how much you love them may that buoy them because they're walking into a lot of stuff lord direct their heart their will their obedience let them think about jesus all week let them think about his perseverance let them think about his obedience let them think about his love let them think about his concern for others let them think about his death for them and may that buoy them until

I see them again or in this case I'm sure Paul knew he was never getting back what a what an intimate little text the apostles the apostle Paul we have an inside look here when he thought about

himself this is what he wanted prayer prayer from them that might be enough for you right there this week you might say man I've been coming to this place three years I never once started thinking about am I supposed to be praying for the people doing this word thing okay you got me I'm going to pray that the word goes forth I'm going to tell you that evilness doesn't take the pastor think about me your pastor is confident in the

Lord he will buttress you he will guard you your pastor is confident that you will continue to give yourself to the best of your ability and knowledge to live in accordance with the message that's preached what is your pastor going to pray for you this week I'm going to pray that you'll experientially!

Be warmed! As you consider God's love for you! And you will be bolstered until we see each other again eye to eye!

[34 : 24] that you can make it as you draw strength from all the ways in which Christ continued to make it for you! Our Heavenly Father we give ourselves to you this week thankful for this little paragraph that by way of principle can matter to us and so hold us in all these truths this week as we give ourselves to you and as we give ourselves to one another in Jesus name Amen