

Rejoice and Pray

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[0:00] Let us turn now to 1 Thessalonians as we are coming towards the end of this letter. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. And we'll read from, well we were looking before at a section coming up to about verse 15, but we'll read from verse 12.

1 Thessalonians chapter 5. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

We looked at these verses before. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Then I want us to look at the following verses, very small verses.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

[1:16] Do not quench the Spirit. So on. Now, Paul, as we saw last time, had been giving very clear instructions about Christian living.

And how important it is for the growth and for the good of the church that we work at our relationships one with another. It's very, very important that good relationships are part and parcel of the church's life.

Because as the relationships thrive and develop and grow, so spiritual growth will develop and grow as well.

And then following on from these instructions about right living, we have these tiny verses. Now, they are very, very small, but the smallness of a verse or the shortness of a particular truth written for us doesn't in any way take away from the depth that is conveyed in it.

And we're never to judge the worth of anything by its length. It's not long letters or long speeches or even long prayers that count. We'll come to see that in a moment when we see pray without ceasing.

[2:37] Because sometimes people think that it's the length of a prayer that counts. It's not. It's a heart of a prayer. It's the sincerity of a prayer.

And we know that some of the greatest prayers ever offered were tiny prayers. Prayers that the Lord answered. And we read about that in the Bible. Again, you think just for an example, the Apostle Paul, before he was converted, Saul of Tarsus.

He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He would have been the kind of man that Jesus would have criticized and condemned for having stood at street corners, praying, making a public spectacle of himself so that people would think how good he was.

But as far as the Lord was concerned, he had never really prayed. Because his prayers weren't the expression of a disciple.

It wasn't a heart to the Lord. And that's why Jesus said to Ananias, after Saul had this great revelation, remember, on the road to Damascus.

[3:45] And when Jesus told Ananias to go and visit Saul, he said, But Saul, that's a man who's persecuted in the church. I can't go and see him.

And Jesus said to Ananias, behold, he prays. That's what he's doing now. He's praying. The man who often went through the motions of prayer, but it wasn't real prayer.

It might have been like the Pharisee in the temple who made this long prayer. He was thanking God about how good he was. And all the different. He was telling God about all the things that he did.

He didn't go to his house justified, but it was the publican over in the corner who couldn't even lift his eyes to heaven. But just, he was banging, as it were, his chest.

And all, he was saying, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. He went down to his house justified. Because it's a heart that the Lord is seeing. It's not the length, as we say, of the particular words.

[4 : 48] And that's why we're highlighting here sometimes great truths. They're just little short things we have here. And so that's what we find. And so Paul, after saying that we are not to repay anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Then he says, rejoice always. And from verses 13 to 16, we notice that Paul actually highlights four characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit.

In verse 13, we find that he talks about love, because of their love, and peace. He highlights love and peace. And then in verse 14, we find emphasizing the need for patience.

And then here in verse 16, for joy. And these characteristics of the Spirit, these aren't things that we can manufacture in ourselves.

It's not sufficient for ourselves to say, right, today I'm going to feel full of joy. We don't operate like that. Even with the best will in the world.

[5 : 59] If you get up in the morning and say, right, today, today's a day of joy. I am going to be joyful in all situations. Well, it might not be very long until some situation comes where you can have no joy whatever, because your heart might be broken.

But you'll notice what we read in Philippians, the secret of where the joy is to be found. It's rejoice in the Lord.

And that's very different. Because there are circumstances and sorrows and tragedies and temptations and trials where you cannot, in a sense, rejoice because of them.

Or find yourself, your reaction to them is one of, oh, this is joy. Not at all. But the ministry of the Spirit, as we submit to the Lord, as we submit to him, the Lord is able to give us that joy.

He's able to give us this patience. He's able to give us this love, as we have written there. He's able to give us this peace.

[7 : 15] It's in him. And that is the key. It's not something that is within ourselves. It's not something that we work up and say, right, I am going to be a man of peace.

But we, well, of course we have to put in our own work into these things. But we've also got to seek the Lord and say, Lord, please produce work in me.

May your Spirit produce the fruit of peace. May it become evident in my life. And, you know, sometimes when you pray these kind of prayers, the Lord will begin to test you.

And you'll find yourself going into situations where your patience is really tried and tested. And particularly if you are given to being impatient, don't be surprised if you're praying for patience, that constantly you're going into situations where that very thing has been tested and tried.

Because sometimes when we pray for patience, we expect the Lord to make our life run smoothly. And so that it's going to be easy to be patient. But that's not the way that patience develops.

[8 : 29] It's like the gym. It's like the gym where you go and it's through resistance and pushing and tensions and pressing. And that's how these graces develop and grow within us.

And so we're commanded here to rejoice always. And that means, of course, primarily to rejoice in the Lord. And we have a lot to rejoice in the Lord about.

Because today when you think about it, if you're here as a believer, think about the Lord. Who he is and what he has done for you personally.

As the psalmist says, he took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay and he set my feet upon a rock and he's established my way.

That's one of the things he's done for you. And when you go through it all, you can go right back.

And you can begin to imagine, and we can only imagine, as we know, the truths of the Bible, we believe with all our heart, we lay hold upon it, but we cannot work them out.

[9 : 36] Of how Father and Son together from all eternity, and yet there comes this point. Where the Son takes our nature. Great is the mystery of godliness, Christ manifest in the flesh.

Where Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, takes to himself human nature in what we term the incarnation. It's a mystery.

And yet we can personalize this and say, he actually did that for me. And when you stop and think about how personal it is, he did that for me.

And when you picture Jesus in the garden, being taken by his enemies, and the mock trial, and all the abuse that he suffered.

And you're saying, you know, he did that for me. When you think about him in the wilderness and being bombarded by Satan, and being tried and tempted.

[10:42] You say, you know, he did that for me. And when you hear him on the cross saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

You're able to say, he did that for me. That's why he was forsaken and abandoned. All for me. He was buried in a grave for me.

He rose from the grave for me. And so we're able to look at this. And when our heart is properly focused upon these things, and we meditate upon these things, we cannot but rejoice in the Lord. When we think of who he is, of what he has done, what he is continuing to do within us, because he tells in his word that he will not give up.

Surely, the psalmist says, surely that which concerneth me the Lord will perfect make. We're told in the New Testament, he who has begun a good work, he will complete it, he will finish it, he will go on.

[11:51] The Lord cannot abandon. We may feel we've abandoned him. We may feel we've forsaken him. We may go through slippery times and dangerous times.

We may fall. But you know, we'll never fall without a recovery. Because the Lord has a hold of us by his hand. We've talked about that before.

The steps of a good man or a good passion. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Though he or she fall, they will not be utterly cast down.

Why? Because the Lord upholds them with his hand. And so, there are so many things, as we reflect through God's word, which should cause us to rejoice.

The joy of the Lord, we're told, is your strength. And if today, now, we've always got to remember that you may say to yourself, well, if you're in my circumstances, you'll find it very, very hard to rejoice.

[12:53] But for the believer, there is this tension. Paul sums it up. And he says, sorrowful, yet rejoicing.

Paul knew sorrows. An abundant amount of sorrows. Paul was a man who, I think if you go through and study the life of Paul, and follow through his life in Acts, and then read his testimonies in the various epistles, you'll say to yourself, Paul, you had such a hard life.

You were let down so often by people. You were abandoned. People you trusted and depended upon, they forsook you. You were imprisoned.

You were beaten up. You were stoned. You were left for dead. He had a horrendous time physically and mentally. The abuse he suffered for the sake of Christ.

And so he's able to stay sorrowful. Yes. But rejoicing. And that's the extraordinary tension. It's the same as what Peter says. He says, wherein we greatly rejoice.

[14:05] Though now, for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through various temptations and trials.

Isn't that amazing? On the one hand, greatly rejoicing, and yet going through these trials and temptations. But as we said, the key to it is in the Lord.

And may we ask the Lord to give us that focus and say to the Lord, Lord, help me to rejoice in you. Yes, my heart might be sore.

My heart is sore. It's been tough, Lord. But may the joy of the Lord become my strength. And the Lord will answer that prayer. That is a prayer that is in accordance with his will.

And he will hear and he will answer. Then we're told to pray without ceasing. Pray without ceasing. What is prayer?

[15:05] Well, there's many definitions. Prayer is the offering up of our desires in the name of Christ for things in accordance with his will. There are many definitions and such like of prayer.

Prayer is, as we know, it's essential to our Christian walk. And if we're not praying, we're in trouble. You could almost go as far as to say, if a person says, I'm a believer and never prays.

Well, that's a contradiction in terms. As we said of Saul of Tarsus, when he was converted, the main mark was, hey, he's a changed man. He's praying. We cannot but pray.

And the Lord will hear our prayer when we come to him in sincerity and in truth. Now, of course, there are various types of prayer.

There is what we would maybe term inward prayer, mental prayer, where there are no audible words. And probably that is the type of prayer we offer most of all.

[16:14] Because we're so often speaking to the Lord in various situations. But we're not doing it audibly. But we're doing it by faith. And we're doing it with concentration.

We're focused upon what we're doing. And we might be doing it at work. We might be doing it so driving in the car. We might be sitting in the house. We might be lying in our bed at night.

But we're speaking to the Lord in our mind. It is clear what we're doing. We're engaged in prayer. Not audibly, outwardly, but it is still real prayer. Then there is prayer, what we might call sudden prayer.

Where all of a sudden, we're thrown into a situation. And we don't know what to do. And we ask the Lord for help. A classic example of that is Nehemiah.

Before the king. And we find that Nehemiah, before he has to answer. He's asked a question. Before he answers, he has to. He's saying, Lord, what do I say? We've been in lots of these situations.

[17:15] Where we just instantly turn to the Lord. Lord, help me. I don't know what to do. Lord, give me grace in this situation. It's sudden. Then there are the times of where we would engage in public prayer.

This morning, when I prayed, I led in prayer. When we come to our prayer meetings, we ask people to lead in prayer. It's a very responsible thing to lead in prayer.

Because what the person is doing is praying. And those who are gathered with the congregation, we're not there to make assessment and judgment and say, Oh, well, I used to get none.

That's a nice prayer. Or say, oh, that's not as good a prayer as the last prayer. If we are ever doing that, we actually shouldn't be there at all. That is an abuse of the privilege.

The person leading in prayer is doing just that. Leading the others in prayer. So when we're at a prayer meeting, we're not there just to say, oh, well, that's okay.

[18:26] We should be praying along with the person. And if we are in the right spirit and the right frame, that's what we find. As a person is speaking to the Lord, our mind and our heart is in tune.

And it should open up our mind to pray alongside. And then lead so that one person will be going in one direction in prayer. Another will be going in another.

As a person leading is opening up, as it were, doors for us to pray. So always remember that for all who are present, that we are engaged in prayer at the same time.

And for the person leading in prayer, it's quite a responsibility. But that's what you're doing. Leading the people in prayers. We deliberately say that, use that expression, could you lead us in prayer.

So there's that aspect of the public prayer. And then there are what we might term the secret prayer where we do go alone with the Lord. And we make sure that this is a point or a place.

[19:31] It might be out in the moor. We don't want to be disturbed. Very hard today to get places where you don't get disturbed. But this is where you want to be locked alone with the Lord.

And you may even on your own pray audibly. Even if it's whispering. But it's more audible than what we would term the prayer within your own mind.

And then there are periods of what we may term extraordinary prayer. Where there is some intense burden upon you. And you cannot stop praying. It is such that it won't leave you day or night.

You may end up fasting over it. You may, it's something that is, it's really taking over your whole person. There's lots of different aspects of prayer. But here it tells us to pray without ceasing.

And I think basically what that means is that we keep up a constant fellowship and dialogue with heaven. And then this will include very much, it will include every aspect of prayer.

[20:36] But very much the prayer that we have within our own minds as we go along with the silent prayer. And it is, it's like as if you're speaking to somebody on the phone. It's your landline, not the mobile, but your landline.

And you're speaking to somebody on the phone. And you say, oh, hold on a moment. I've got to go and do this. And you put the phone. You don't put the phone back down. You just leave it. And you say to the other person, don't hang up.

Just leave. And you go and you do something. Then you pick up again. And you carry on the conversation. Oh, hold on. And you put it down. So that there's this ongoing, you're picking up. And in a sense it's like that.

There's this constant dialogue with heaven. All the time, speaking to the Lord. And the Lord's ministering to you. When you're speaking like that to the Lord, the channel is open. And the spirit of the Lord is working within you. And the Lord, you know, the Lord will put things into your heart to pray for. And he will sometimes convict you of your sin and show you things. [21 : 35] And so you're asking the Lord for forgiveness and mercy. You're asking him for light and direction. You're asking the Lord, speaking to him all the day long. So I believe that that's kind of what we have here.

Prayer. John Bunyan said of prayer. Prayer is sacrifice to God. A shield to the soul. And a scourge to Satan. And I think that is so true.

Prayer, a sacrifice to God. A shield to the soul. And a scourge to Satan. And then, I have to move very quickly. It says, verse 18, Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. You know, sometimes people say, you know, I really want to do God's will. I want to know God's will for my life. And they're speaking about it regarding a particular situation or circumstance they're in.

And they say, I really, really want to know God's will. But, you know, sometimes when the pressure is on and there is something that we really, really want to know.

[22 : 44] I've been in this situation. I'm saying to the Lord, Lord, show me your will here. I really want to know what to do. And I'm praying and praying. And I'm not getting any leading and any direction.

And as I pray, it's like a still, small voice that is saying to me, You want to know my will.

Well, I have shown you my will in many things. And you're not doing my will in many of the simple things in life. It's a real rebuke. Because the Lord is really saying, why all of a sudden do you want to know my will in this thing when there are other areas and aspects of your life?

And I have shown you my will. And you're not prepared to accept and to do. These can be really, really challenging moments and times where we have to reassess our life.

And we have to ask the Lord for forgiveness. And ask the Lord for grace that we may indeed comply and do with what he says. As the word says, in all your ways acknowledge him.

[23 : 55] In all your ways seek to live according to his way. And he will direct your paths. Once you go through that, once you begin to deal with that, the Lord will then show you the way that you're looking for.

But the Lord, remember, is so concerned about your life. That he says, yeah, I know what you're asking. And I'm going to show you the way that you want me to show you.

But first of all, one or two things that need to be dealt with. Sometimes that's what the Lord will show us. So here we're shown something that is according to the will of God.

Give thanks in all circumstances. Now again, we have to say to yourselves, I think it's very important that this is brought to our mind.

Because it's something we may be very slow at doing. It's giving thanks to the Lord. Many a time we have prayed to the Lord. And we've used the illustration before, but how true.

[24 : 57] Remember the ten lepers that came to Jesus. And they were in agony. And they were pleading. And they were crowned to the Lord for deliverance.

The Lord healed them. As he went on their way, they were healed. And remember, there was only one who came back. And he fell down before Jesus. And he offered thanks.

And Jesus asked the question, where are the nine? And there was this one man, a Samaritan, who came back to give thanks to God. And that, unfortunately, is so often true of us.

That we're slow to return the thanks to him. So we're told here, we read about it in Philippians. In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

Now we find that Paul was such a man. He was always, always giving thanks. In all circumstances. We read about that in Philippians. But he learned. It wasn't something that happened overnight.

[26 : 03] Again, you may be saying to yourself, well, it's very difficult for me to be thanking the Lord. Because of the way my life is.

And the things that have happened in my life. Well, we've got to remember that two of the greatest people in the Bible who were constantly praising and giving thanks to God.

Were people, yes, who had many great blessings, but also great sorrows. We already highlighted the Apostle Paul. But David was a man after God's own heart. And I believe part of it was he was a man who lived with praise and thanksgiving on his lips.

And yes, David rose to the top and he had so many great providential blessings in life. But he also had heartaches. You read the life of David.

I think one of the worst arrows was where Absalom, our great favorite son, turned and tried to, he betrayed his father.

[27 : 05] And tried to kill his father. And even although he was trying to kill David, David was saying to his people, please spare my son. Don't kill him.

And yet, Absalom was killed. And you can never read of it without the anguish in David's heart. David was a man, when you go through his life, that's just one example. There were so many sorrows in his life.

Within his family. And yet, we find that David is always praising and thanking God. And that's what we have here. We're not praising God for the particular situation.

But, you know, even within the sorrows, you're able to find God's mercy. It's a wonderful thing. Time has gone. And just, last thing, just very, very briefly.

Do not quench the Spirit. Now, we know that the Holy Spirit is given to us two different pictures. Given of the dove and given to us a picture of fire.

[28 : 08] And the dove is a picture of something that is so sensitive. And so we're told, grieve not the Spirit. Here, we're told, quench not the Spirit. And again, thinking of the picture of fire.

What does the fire do? Well, the fire gives light. And that's one of the things the Holy Spirit does. He comes and he gives light. When a person is being worked on by the Holy Spirit, that's one of the things that happens.

You're sitting in church. And all of a sudden, you're beginning to understand things you didn't used to. Sometimes you say, my word, the time's going past quicker.

It used to drag out forever. But it's not so long these days. You say to yourself, the minister's a lot shorter. It's not only shorter. It's the same length of time. It's just you're beginning to understand things.

What's happening? Has your IQ grown? Not at all. It's your eyes have been opened. This is part of the ministry of the Spirit. Where light is coming into your heart.

[29 : 13] And you're beginning to understand what the Word says. Again, fire gives power. And that's the Holy Spirit gives power so that the message comes accompanied with power.

As you read the Word, as the Word is read or the Word is preached, there is power. Ministering it into your heart, into your soul. You say to yourself, this is for me.

Fire brings warmth. And that's again part of what you find the ministry of the Spirit. Bringing the glow of the gospel into your heart.

And there's a thrill in your heart. A warmth to the things of God. Again, fire purifies. That's how you sort out the dross. You remove what's not of worth.

When you put metals into the fire, it gets rid of all the rubbish. Quench so that only the real stuff lasts. It comes out of the fire. And again, that's the minute where the Holy Spirit is working within us to produce this.

[30 : 21] So we're told, don't quench the Spirit. So how do you quench a fire? Well, there's a lot of things. But two things that we can do. One is we can stamp on a fire.

Or put a blanket on a fire. And try and stamp it out. Another way you can, thinking of the fire in the house. If you neglect the fire, it'll go out.

You know, sometimes you've gone away and you've forgotten to put coal or something. And you come back and, oh, the fire's nearly out. Same is true spiritually. If we stamp, as it were, upon the ministry of the Spirit.

And we can do it in various ways. For instance, if we continue to sin in the knowledge of light. If we continue to despise God's Word. And push it aside.

And trample on it. And say, no, I want to do my own thing. I want to go my way. I know what God's Word is saying. But, oh, I don't like it. Because it's getting in the way of my life.

[31 : 21] That's trampling on the Word. That's trampling on the ministry of the Spirit. That is quenching the Spirit. Again, if we neglect.

We can neglect publicly and privately. The Word and prayer. The Word is one of the key sources of our sanctification.

Jesus, before he died, prayed. Sanctify them through the truth. Thy Word is truth. And so, as we come under the Word, publicly or privately.

The Spirit is ministering to us. Now, if we neglect this. If we say, ah. And if we don't read our Bibles. It's the ABC.

But it's true. If we neglect reading God's Word. We will begin to quench the Spirit. Make sure every day.

[32 : 19] That the Word of God. Doesn't have to be a huge section. I've always said. I think it's better than trying to read huge sections of God's Word.

It's to read a small part prayerfully. And meditate upon it. It will do more good to your soul. Than reading huge chunks in your mind all over the place. It's important to focus upon the truth.

And pray to the Lord. Open my eyes. That I might behold wonderful things out of thy law. So, it is so important that we seek to not to quench the Spirit.

And we've got to guard against all the things. Guard against the cares of this world. Remember in Jesus in the parable of the sower. How he said the good seed was choked by the cares of this world.

There's so many things that we could highlight. May we seek then to live in this way. Rejoicing. Praying. Giving thanks.

[33 : 19] And seeking to live carefully before the Lord. So that the Spirit will minister and not be quenched. Let us pray. Lord our God, we give thanks for the Word that we've been under again today.

We pray that it might indeed bring fruit into our lives. To the glory of God. We pray for teachable spirits. We pray that we will not be like those who are trampling the Word underfoot.

But that we might bow under its power. And under its authority. And under its necessity. Do us good, we pray. And take away from us our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.