

# 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 07 April 2013

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let me read this text for us. Paul writes this, Now, may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness, before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Let's pray together as we consider this passage. God, we thank you for your word this morning. Lord, we thank you that as you tell us in the book of Hebrews, it's living and it's active.

Lord, that through your word you speak and you penetrate down into the deepest areas of our heart and our soul and our very being. God, we pray as we meditate and unpack this short passage this morning, that you would do just that by your spirit.

Lord, that you would get down deep into who we are. Lord, and from the inside out, we would be renewed and we would be changed. God, that as a church, we wouldn't be left the same after our dealings this morning with you and your word.

[ 1 : 2 6 ] God, that our worship of you would increase. Our longing to follow you and be like you in the world would increase. And Lord, our hope in you, our confidence in you would grow.

Lord, we ask this in the name of Christ. Amen. Well, we've been studying 1 Thessalonians this spring. We took a couple weeks off for the Easter season, but we're back into our series this morning.

And in this series, we've been asking the question, what does it mean to be a gospel-centered church? What does it mean and what does it look like to live gospel-centered lives?

In other words, given the fact that God has redeemed us in Christ by his sheer grace, we want to know what it looks like to live in line with that great truth, to have that reality, the gospel of the grace of Jesus, to be the controlling feature of all that we think and say and do and desire.

It's kind of like this. If you've been keeping up with your celebrity news, which I know you all have, you know that Prince William and Kate are having a baby. Yes. I think mid-July.

[ 2 : 4 1 ] Is that the due date? Come on, am I the only one who knows this? I know you're out there. They're having a baby. I think the due date's mid-July. I don't think they're finding out whether it's a boy or a girl.

But here's the deal. That baby's life is going to be utterly shaped around the fact that he or she is part of the royal family.

That baby's father is going to be the king one day. And believe me, that is going to shape everything about what that kid wears and where they go to school and what vocations they pursue.

It will be the lens through which they reproach reality. I'm a child of a king. Friends, in the same way, we want the gospel of Christ to be the defining center of our lives.

You see, we want that to be the lens through which we approach reality. Because after all, in Christ, we're not just followers, but we're children of the king.

[ 3 : 46 ] So that's what we've been after in 1 Thessalonians. What does it mean to be a gospel-centered church? What does it look like to live gospel-centered lives? And with our text this morning, we come to somewhat of a transition point in the book of 1 Thessalonians.

It kind of rounds off the first part in chapters 1 through 3, and it sets up the second part in chapters 4 through 5. Over the course of chapters 2 and 3 in particular, you'll remember that Paul has been writing about his intimate relationship with the church in Thessalonica.

If you kind of just scan through where we've come so far, you'll see that in chapter 2, verses 1 through 12, Paul recounted his initial ministry among the Thessalonians, and then he goes in in verses 13 through 16 to their reception of the gospel.

Verses 17 through 20, he was torn away from them, but he longs to see them earnestly. So in verses 3 through 5 of chapter 3, he sends Timothy to them. And finally, in verses 6 through 10 of chapter 3, Timothy has returned and has brought this report that the Thessalonians are standing firm in their faith, and Paul is overjoyed.

And throughout this personal narrative, Paul has been expressing his deep love and concern for the Thessalonians. Like a parent would regard a beloved child, Paul has said that they are his hope and his joy and his crown of boasting, that they are his glory and his joy.

[ 5 : 00 ] And even in verse 3 of verse 8 of chapter 3, he says, Now I live, if you're standing fast in the Lord. There is life. And as we've studied these passages, we've learned some profound lessons about the nature of gospel ministry, even the reality of suffering, and the power of the gospel message.

So now Paul is kind of rounding that off. And how does he round it off? How does he bring his personal account to a close? He prays. He prays for the church, for his friends, for his brothers and sisters, for his beloved Christians in Thessalonica.

What does he pray for? Well, it's pretty straightforward. Verse 11, he prays that God would allow them to be reunited, as he so earnestly desires. That's what we've been studying in these previous chapters.

Verse 12, he prays that the Lord Jesus would increase their love. And then in verse 13, finally, that the Lord would establish their hearts blameless in holiness. Now why is this prayer important for us today?

Why should we be paying attention to this prayer? You know, oftentimes, our desires for our own lives, and our ambitions for our life together as the church, you know, sometimes I think it's sort of like a paper airplane.

[ 6 : 22 ] You know, you kind of give it a good toss, and it sails along for a while at a good height, and then it starts sinking and drooping, and it gets lower and lower, and our dreams, they get smaller and smaller, and our vision gets obscured as it drops down, and suddenly we're dangerously close to just crash landing altogether.

But, you see, Paul's prayer here, it's like this powerful rush of air that lifts us back up to the heights again. Here we get to soar once more and see what real gospel-centered life is meant to be.

And this soaring desire for the church that lifts us up to our true heights once again is that we be loving and that we be holy.

This is to be our great goal and our earnest desire, our longing, our ambition, our passion, our prayer as a church. Not to be comfortable, not to be wealthy, not to be cool or trendy, although we do have a slick website.

Rather, to be a loving church and to be a holy church. And what about your own life? What is your ambition, your passion, your great goal and desire?

[ 7 : 54 ] Is it to be comfortable? Is it to be wealthy? Is it to be popular or admired or esteemed? Or is it to be truly loving?

Is it to be genuinely holy? Well, as we learn to make Paul's prayer and passion our prayer and our passion, I want us to consider it under three headings this morning.

First, I want us to see that it's what God wants. Second, that it's what the world needs. And third, that it's what the gospel creates. So first, this is what God wants.

Now, at a very basic level, we know that it's what God wants because this is one of Jesus' apostles praying for the church, right? Jesus handpicked Paul to preach the gospel, to write authoritatively to the churches and gave him the Holy Spirit and inspired him to do so.

So, that's a pretty good sign we're on the right track when we're figuring out what God wants us to be and do, right? But you know, if you take a step back and look over the scope of redemptive history in scripture, what is God doing?

[ 9 : 05 ] You see that he's creating a people. God is creating a people who reflect his character to the world. And God reveals his character to be supremely loving and supremely holy.

Exodus 34 contains one of the most important passages for understanding God's character in the Old Testament. Moses prays to God and says, God, show me your glory. And God says, look, Moses, no human can see me and live.

But, in his mercy, God lets Moses sort of hide in a little cleft of a rock, in a little cave, and God causes his glory to come by and allows Moses just to catch a glimpse of it.

And then God declares his name to Moses. Which in the Old Testament, someone's name means their nature. And the key passage starting in Exodus 34, 6 says this, the Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

But, who will by no means clear, the guilty. So you see, this is who God is.

[ 10 : 36 ] Abounding in steadfast love and at the same time, utterly holy. And throughout redemptive history, God has been creating a people who are marked by love and holiness.

Adam and Eve were created in God's image to bear his likeness in the world God had made. But they fell and in their rebellion took all humanity with them.

And yet God doesn't leave the story there. He begins his plan of redemption by calling Abraham, creating the nation of Israel, who would again display God's image and likeness to the world.

But Israel is only an imperfect display, right? They couldn't be the true image bearer for they too, like all humanity, were fallen. But through Israel, God sends his own son, who we are told at the beginning of John's gospel became flesh and dwelt among us.

and John says, we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

[ 11 : 54 ] There it is, grace and truth, love and holiness. Jesus Christ, friends, is the perfect display of God's character in the world.

Christ. But the story doesn't end there either. For Jesus came to redeem a people from all nations, to create a new humanity, as it were, who through his spirit would display that same character to the nations.

That in the church, the image of God in humanity, marred through the fall and fractured, would begin to be restored. Imagine a stone striking a mirror.

And the mirror cracks in a hundred different ways. And now the reflection in that mirror is something, it's like something from a carnival. It's disfigured and disjointed and practically unrecognizable.

Friends, that is fallen humanity. That is us and our fallenness. But you see, through Christ, the cracks begin to be repaired. And the mirror is being reforged so that reflection can shine forth once again.

[ 13 : 10 ] That's the church, friends. The people Christ has redeemed from the fall where the character of God begins to shine forth once again in love and in holiness. So you see, this is what God wants.

And what all of redemptive history has been about is coming, crashing into this little prayer of Paul. So what do we mean by these words love and holiness?

You know, in the broken mirror of humanity, both often get very distorted, don't they? So we need to look closely at how the Bible talks about both or else we'll simply fall into parodies of the real thing.

So let us look at each one in turn. Let's look at love and then let's look at holiness and see what Paul has to say about them here. So first, love. What does Paul mean by love here? What Paul means and what the Bible means by love, God's love, it's not a mere feeling and it's not a mere attraction towards a desirable object, right?

Here's how 1 John 3.16 defines love. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

[ 14 : 30 ] You see, friends, biblically speaking, love is the giving of one's self for the good of another. It's self-sacrifice for another's good.

Think of how foreign that is to our common notions of love. I mean, on the one hand, I often sacrificially seek my own good, right? I would forgo all sorts of pleasures to get the stuff that I want.

I'm pretty good at that. You can ask my wife, right? And on the other hand, I will seek someone else's good, but only to a point, right?

When I've got the extra time or resources, if it doesn't get in the way of what I already have planned, but to seek another's good sacrificially, that's biblical love.

And it costs us something. And it sets us back. And it takes time and resources and a rearrangement of my plans. And you know what? It closes off some of my options.

[ 15 : 41 ] And it limits some of my possibilities. And it does all that so that another's possibilities, so that another's plans can be opened.

It's a limiting of me so that another can experience good. And note that Paul prays that this kind of love, as sort of counter-cultural as that sounds, wouldn't just be evident, sort of there in trace amounts, right?

That it wouldn't just grow, but that it would increase and abound. That it would rise and overflow.

That it would be excessive and lavish and uncontainable. It's like a river when the snow melts in the spring.

You know, first it kind of increases and it rises and it rises and then it overflows, doesn't it? And it runs over the banks and starts going in every direction, into people's yards and into roads.

[ 16 : 49 ] And it starts rearranging things. You know, you can't drive down the same streets anymore. And you've got to redo your, you know, your landscaping because it totally wrecked things. You know, this kind of love, when it starts taking effect, it doesn't leave things the same.

John Chrysostom, the church father, wrote on these verses, do you see the unrestrainable madness of love that is shown by his words increase and abound?

The unrestrainable madness of love. Friends, when people look at the church, they should see what strikes them as an unrestrainable madness of love.

It should be changing the scenery as it were. And isn't that the love of God, friends? Think of God's own life as Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity glorifying and loving each other and out of the overflow of that infinitely abundant love comes the act of creation.

God, out of nothing, creating that which is not God, a deliberate act of his abounding love and glory so that he might be known and praised all the more. And like God's own love, the love that Paul prays for us here is not just inward.

[ 18 : 25 ] It's not just inward focused, but it's outward, isn't it? That you would increase and abound in love for one another and for all, he says.

Not just Christians, not just fellow church members, although that for sure, but for all. Not just inward, but outward. Like God's love that moved outward in creation.

Like God's love that continues to move outward in providence as he causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall in the just and the unjust. Like God's love that continues to move outward in redemption, sending his son to suffer and die for us while we were still sinners, his enemies.

That's the kind of love that Paul prays for and that God intends for us to have. Well, let's consider the idea of holiness that Paul prays for.

You know, the idea of holiness in the Bible carries a couple of overlapping ideas. On the one hand, holiness is to be set apart. Sometimes when God is described as the holy one, it means he's utterly set apart and above us, completely transcendent in every way, holy other.

[ 19 : 42 ] And in a related sense, sometimes created things are designated as holy or set apart. And in this sense, they're sort of set apart for a noble purpose, like all the stuff in the temple in the Old Testament was designated as holy, set apart for that noble purpose of functioning in the temple.

And sometimes even the people as a whole are sort of, you know, spoken of as holy in this sense, set apart for that noble purpose. But in addition to that sort of meaning of holiness, set apart or distinct, it often carries with it the idea of being set apart or distinct morally.

In other words, holiness can mean something like moral beauty or purity. God, of course, is supremely holy in this sense, beautiful in his holiness.

But in the Old Testament, God also commanded Israel to be holy as I am holy. And the passage we read earlier from 1 Peter picks this up and applies it to Christians, as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Since it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy. The New Testament people of God, just like the Old Testament people of God, called into this holy life of God to pursue the beauty of moral conformity to God's own character.

[ 21 : 09 ] But notice a critical detail. Paul's prayer, did you notice, is for their hearts to be blameless in holiness?

Not merely their conduct, but their very heart. And when Paul says heart, he doesn't mean simply our emotions, but the very center of our identity.

That part of the human person that includes and undergirds our will and our emotions and our intellect. The heart you see is that motivational core of who you are.

It's the you that worships and treasures and desires and in so doing directs your will and your thinking and your feeling. Paul says, we want that to be holy.

We want that to be set apart for a noble purpose. We want that to be pure and beautiful in its likeness to God. So you see, if the love that Paul prayed for is not just inward but outward, this holiness that Paul is praying for is not just outward but it's inward.

[ 22 : 18 ] It's not just about externals. It's not just about keeping the rules. It's not a big to-do list. It's about your very heart becoming more and more like God's own heart.

Loving what he loves. Being pleased by what pleases him. Desiring what he desires. Longing for his kingdom to come and for his will to be done.

That's what Paul's praying for here. You know, it's like an apprentice to a great craftsman. In the ancient world, you know, you wouldn't become an apprentice just to learn how to swing a hammer or to use a chisel.

You'd apprentice yourself to a great master and spend so much time with him that when you looked at the block of marble, say that you were going to turn into a statue. You wouldn't just know how to hit it with your tools, but you would actually start to see in that block of marble what the master craftsman would see.

You would learn how to respond, how he would respond, and to shape it, how he would shape it, even though the circumstances might be different. That's what Paul's praying for.

[ 23 : 37 ] That our hearts would be holy. So Paul prays for love and he prays for holiness. And in this praying, he prays for what God wants.

A people who are increasingly reflecting his glorious character in the world. Friends, let me ask you, what other goal or desire or passion or longing or prayer has the kind of grandeur or glory of this passion and this prayer?

To be the mirror of renewed humanity upon which the image of God will shine forth in all of its fullness.

When we pray this prayer and we make this our passion, we're aligning our aspirations and our affections with the eternal purpose of God himself. So let me ask, friends, do you think it's a small thing that we're doing here at Trinity Baptist Church?

Are we just playing a game? Kind of going through the motions? Gathering on Sundays for an hour and a half? Friends, let me remind you that being the church is no small thing.

[ 25 : 09 ] It is not a game we play. God is calling and creating a people. God is calling and creating us. to be a people who will display his character to the nations and who will enjoy fellowship with him forever.

You see, when God is surrounded by the heavenly hosts and they're questioning him about the purposes and the wisdom of his plans and his control, do you know what he points at?

Of course, he points to his son and then he points to the body of his son, the church. It's there that the manifold wisdom of God is displayed.

This prayer is what God wants. But second, friends, it's what the world needs. We're not going to spend as much time on this point, but consider it.

Don't we live in a world that doesn't know real love? It knows just about as much as it can about loving my own tribe, doesn't it?

[ 26 : 25 ] You know, loving the people that are like me, loving the people that have my same sort of desires, loving the people that are, you know, in my same kind of cluster of humanity. It knows how to love a tribe, but does it know this kind of love?

It knows all about feeling and sentiment and individual expression. It knows all about being used and taken advantage of in the name of love. But friends, imagine if your neighbors and your friends and your roommates could get a taste of the kind of love that Paul is praying for here.

Imagine if our church were known for an extravagant kind of love that sacrificially sought out the good of others. Not for what we could get out of the deal, but because that kind of love was increasing and abounding from a deeper source.

Not just an inward love for fellow believers, but an outward love for all. If they could get a taste of that, then perhaps they begin to see the God who is love.

We live in a world that doesn't know real love. We also live in a world that doesn't know real holiness, right? It knows hypocrisy to be sure, and the church has been guilty of much of that.

[ 27 : 48 ] It knows self-righteousness. It's seen plenty of that. It knows disappointment at moral failure. But again, friends, imagine if you could get a taste of the beauty of true holiness.

a life without bitterness and jealousy or greed or impurity. A life with gladness and forgiveness and honor and generosity.

Not just an external religiosity, but true inward godliness. Then perhaps our friends and our neighbors and our roommates and the people we interact with on a day-to-day basis, then perhaps they'd start to see this God who is holy.

Friends, we live in a world that doesn't know real love or real holiness because we live in a world that doesn't know the real God. It knows idols, of course.

It has plenty of false gods. Success and pleasure and power and control. But as Paul describes him in chapter 1, verse 9, it doesn't know the living and the true God.

[ 29 : 19 ] And yet, friends, if the church were to pray earnestly for the love and holiness that Paul prays for here, and if we were to pursue it with all the strength that God provides through His Spirit, then perhaps the world would begin to see a glimpse of that living and true God in His love and in His holiness.

You see, the church, friends, living in love and holiness is the greatest apologetic for the reality of God, the lordship of Christ, and the truth of the gospel.

It's what God wants and it's what the world needs. But you know, as we consider how much the world needs this, we have to admit the difficulty we face in becoming that kind of church, don't we?

How far we often fall short. After all, isn't it kind of hard to be a loving church and a holy church? It seems pretty easy to be one or the other.

You know, to be a loving church, not very holy. To be a holy church, not very loving. Many of us have sort of experienced maybe both of those poles, right? But you see, friends, we can't have one truly without the other.

[ 30 : 50 ] Did you notice the little words that connect verses 12 and 13? Two little words, so that. And with those little words, Paul is drawing a vital and essential connection between the two.

The increase of love in verse 12 ensures the strengthening of holiness in verse 13. As love gets higher and higher and abounds and increases, holiness gets more and more established and rooted and dug down deep.

So you see, a church or a person, you or I individually, that strives to be holy without the fuel of love, it won't actually be holy. Our holiness will be shallow and hypocritical, it'll be skin deep, it won't get down into the heart and won't purify our affections.

We'll end up just being rule followers who lapse into critical and judgmental spirits. In order to be holy, you've got to have love. But on the other hand, a church or a person that strives to be loving without the goal of holiness, it won't be truly loving.

our love will sort of degrade into a mere permissiveness and it won't challenge when it needs to and it won't confront when that's what love calls for.

[ 32 : 19 ] We all know that true love sometimes has to tell someone when they're in danger, right? When they're in the wrong. There's a loving way to do that, of course, there's a gentle way of doing that, but love can't just always approve.

If so, you'll end up with just sentimentalism and not the sort of biblical picture of love as self-giving for another's good.

So we need both, Paul's telling us. We need the fuel of love and we need the goal of holiness. And still we see that we are so out of our depth, aren't we?

our strength and our resources alone just can't accomplish this. If we were to end the sermon here, this would be the most depressing sermon I think I've ever preached.

Go be loving in holy church and at the same time, good luck. our strength and our resources alone can't accomplish this, friends, which is exactly why Paul is praying.

[ 33 : 33 ] Now, of course, he'll go on to exhort and to encourage and to command. If you look ahead in chapter four, verses one through eight, deal with holiness and then verses nine through 12, deal with love.

But before he gets to that, he prays. He's on his knees, pleading with the Lord.

I like how Calvin put it, commenting on these verses. He said, when God prescribes to us in his commandments the rule of life, he does not look to what we can do, but requires from us what is above our strength, that we may learn to ask from him the power to accomplish it.

Isn't that beautiful? God doesn't look to what we can do. He requires something above our strength that we would learn to run to him and ask him for the power to accomplish it. So how do we become this loving and holy church that God means for us to be and that the world needs for us to be?

Look closely at verse 12. Do you see who does it? Paul's praying that the Lord would do it. That the Lord Jesus himself would make you increase and abound in love.

[ 34 : 54 ] And if you look up at verse 11, you see that it's not just the Lord, but it's the Father and the Son working together in it. May our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus bring us to you. And may the Lord increase your love so that you would be established in holiness.

Father and Son working jointly to bring this about in his church. Notice, by the way, as a sidebar, how Paul places Jesus right alongside God the Father.

Praise to him even. Jesus equated with the one true God seamlessly and effortlessly in Paul's thought and so with all the earliest Christians.

And we see this at the end of the passage again when Paul speaks about the return of Christ, the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. That's the way the Old Testament described God's coming. You can look at Zechariah 14.5 later if you're interested.

But you note there again how the coming of Jesus and our standing before our God and Father on the last day are intertwined. Father and Son working together. So here we have like bookends around Paul's prayer that we become holy and we become loving the Father and Son as the source of our love now and as the horizon and goal beckoning us forth to our holiness then.

[ 36 : 15 ] Well briefly how does the Lord cause our love to well up and spring forth now? You know perhaps the primary way that the Lord answers this prayer is by reminding us through his spirit how greatly you and I have been loved.



He reminds us how his love broke all bounds. How he left heaven and came to earth and how with the cross he was hated and scorned bearing the curse that our sins deserve.

You see his was the ultimate act of self-giving for another's good. for your good and for my good when we deserved nothing of the sort.

As we said earlier this is the most stunning and incomprehensible outward movement of love the world has ever known. While we were still sinners Paul says while we were God's enemies Christ died for us.

God pours his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

[ 37 : 36 ] Friends as you're well running dry today when you think about increasing and abounding in love do you just get tired? I get tired.

My son was up all night last night sick as a dog. I got nothing left in the tank and now I read this text and it says increase and abound in love. I know I'm not the only one like that.

But friends you see in a few moments we're going to take the Lord's Supper and you're going to hold that bread in your hands and you're going to take that cup and you're going to drink it and you're going to taste it in your mouth.

And in so doing we're going to remember the cross. How in love the King of Heaven was broken and poured out for you and for me.

How at the cross he took the breaking that my sins deserved. And how at the cross he was drinking the cup that my sins deserved.

[ 38 : 49 ] That my breaking and my cup there was taken up by my substitute. By my Savior. And friends as surely as you eat that bread and drink that cup you can be assured that his death was for you.

That your sins are forgiven. That your penalty has been paid. That your soul has been set free. You can be assured that through repentance and faith in Christ God is your father and you are his beloved child.

At the table where we remember the cross that's a way to get filled. That's a way to overflow. But you see Paul in his passage he also casts our gaze forward doesn't he?

to the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints with all his holy ones literally. When we stand before our God and Father in the glory of his presence Paul says we want to be ready for that day.

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. These are words that are often used at the Lord's Supper. And friends as we eat and drink we look forward.

[ 40 : 07 ] We don't just look back to the cross but we look forward to the great feast that will begin when Christ returns. The great marriage supper of the Lamb John calls it in Revelation.

Again the passage from 1 Peter that we read set your hearts fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And as we look ahead to that grace as around the table we look forward to that celebration.

As we look ahead to that grace our hearts begin to long to be more and more pure. To be more and more holy.

At first that might seem kind of counterintuitive. But listen to how John says it in 1 John chapter 3. He says, Beloved, we are God's children now. And what we will be has not yet appeared.

[ 41 : 15 ] But we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. And then he says, And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

John says, Believers want to have pure hearts when Jesus comes. Why? Why do we want pure hearts? Because we fear his rejection?

No! Romans 8.1, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ's children. We're God's children now, John says. not for a fear of rejection. Will our holiness ever be perfect in this life?

No. It's a progressive work until the day we die, or until the day Christ returns. By the way, that's why Paul prays for it to be increasing and abounding in verse 12.

He knows there won't ever be a time when we arrive spiritually, when we say, okay, we've got enough love, let's move on to something else. No! It's a lifelong work. But you see, friends, though my acceptance is secure in Christ, and though my sanctification will be incomplete in this life, as much as possible, I want to have a pure heart when he comes.

[ 42 : 39 ] Why? It's simple, friends. Because he's my Lord. And as much as possible, I want to be like him when I see him as he is.

if you love me, Jesus says, you keep my commandments. So, friends, what preparations are you making for the coming of the king?

The city of Thessalonica knew how to prepare well for the coming of their earthly king of Caesar. Deck the town out with regalia, prepare the gifts, get the band ready, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

But, friends, how do we, the church, prepare for the coming of the king of kings? He doesn't want masses of silver and gold and gifts.

He doesn't need trumpets and fanfare. He's actually bringing his own. We'll see that in chapter 4. Jesus wants pure hearts.

[ 43 : 44 ] He wants pure hearts. So, as we go to the Lord's Supper, as we consider that great day when we'll see him as he is, friends, let's examine ourselves.

What sins need to be confessed this morning? Do it before the Lord in your heart. if you are a Christian, one day you will be pure even as he is pure.

So, don't wait another moment to cast aside the sins that are keeping you from an increased beauty of holiness. And, friends, if you're not a Christian this morning, then today, right now, in this service, come to terms with Christ.

Christ, acknowledge your sins, turn from them, and entrust yourself wholly to him. Friends, he will be a rightful judge on that day.

He's the judge of us all. But now, he extends an offer of mercy and forgiveness and peace to all who will come to him in true repentance and faith.

[ 45 : 06 ] And in light of that great mercy he's shown us, Christians, we need to pray Paul's prayer here, that the Lord would cause our love to increase and abound for one another and for all.

You know, as we share the bread and the cup, as we pass it around as brothers and sisters, ask yourself, how am I tangibly, practically, loving these brothers and sisters that God has put in my life, that I'm sharing this feast with?

For starters, do I know them well enough to be able to know how best to love them? Maybe that's where some of us need to start. We have a potluck after the service.

It's a great time to get to know someone. We didn't even plan that out this way. But there you go, perfect opportunity to start loving by getting to know your fellow church members.

or invite someone out to coffee or lunch this week or get into a small group and then once you get to know your brothers and sisters, start praying to the Lord. How can I be loving my brothers and sisters in Christ?

[ 46 : 20 ] Meeting their needs. You'll start to find something uncanny, friends. You'll start to find that the needs that you start seeing around you start matching up with some of the desires and the gifts that you have.

And it will be sacrificial. It will take time. It will take effort. But when this starts happening and when we start asking the same thing not just about our fellow Christians but about our neighbors, when the river starts spilling over the banks, when there's an unrestrainable madness of love that starts to define our church, then you know what we'll do?

we'll pray that the Lord will do so more and more and just keep it coming so that we might reflect his image to the world and so that we might embody more and more who he's created us to be.

Let's pray, friends. Lord, with the Apostle Paul as we turn to the supper now, God, as we turn to this gift that you've given us of the Lord's Supper, Lord, we pray that you would be working in our hearts even now as we contemplate what you've done for us, Lord Jesus, on the cross, and as we look forward to that great day of your return, God, would you cause our love to increase, would you loosen our grasp on the things of this world that keep us so tightly bound up in our selfishness, Lord, in the light of your love, in the light of our hope, loosen our grasp on those things so that we might love, and Lord, in our loving, purify our hearts, make us increasingly holy,

God, like you in every way. Lord, meet us in this way, we pray. God, we can't do it on our own. We need you, Lord, to come and do it within us.

[ 48 : 36 ] For Christ's sake, amen.