

7.12.20 ~ **1Thessalonians 5:16-18**,
Be Joyful Pray-ers, Giving Thanks, in Christ Jesus

Paul encourages the Thessalonians, and all true believers in Christ, that we are to be joyful, to be praying, and to be thankful, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus.

Read **1Thessalonians 5:16-18**... In **verse 16** Paul exhorts us to, "Rejoice always." This is a biblical command for us to experience and express God's joy continually, in Christ. **Philippians 4:4**, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

At first it sounds rather impossible for us to do, given the many hardships we will experience in this life and the struggles we go through sometimes because we are at odds with the godless world around us. God understands this fully, as Peter expresses:

1Peter 4:12-13, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

Having trouble in this world is normal for believers, for the world (all that is opposed to God) hates Jesus, and therefore it hates those who belong to Him; and yet, we are told to be joyful, even if we suffer for Christ, for we know this world is not all there is.

Christians have an eternity to spend with God in heaven, where everything is perfect and there is no crying or mourning, or pain or death: but we are on earth, where the curse of sin corrupts and devastates all biological physical life, and yet we are enabled to joyfully and victoriously live for God right here, no matter what. **Philippians 4:12-13**, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." **19**, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Jesus declares, in **Matthew 5:10**, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The source of our rejoicing is not to be found in this world, for it is because of our salvation and the hope of eternity in heaven. Our joy is supernatural, it is in fact one of the fruit of the Spirit that God gives us at the moment of our salvation? **Galatians 5:22-23**, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

The presence of the deep joy that causes us to rejoice, is a gift from God. When you believe in Jesus, as Lord and Savior, you are born into the Kingdom of God, and

(**Romans 14:17**), "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and **joy** in the Holy Spirit."

As a believer in Christ you have God's **joy**, the problem is you also have a will, and therefore you must chose to express this gift from God; just as you must also choose to be obedient to God's Word.

When we consider all that God has done for us in Christ, and all that we will experience for eternity, how can we not rejoice! Peter understood this (**1Peter 1:3-9**), "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

There are many things that can hinder and even rob us of this God given joy: pride, disbelief, disobedience, ingratitude, ignorance of the Scriptures, lack of prayer, i.e., when we are not exalting God, not feeding upon His Word, not talking to Him in prayer, not obeying what we understand the Scriptures to teach; all these things can cause us to become joyless, incapable of rejoicing, even apathetic, spiritually disabled.

We are able to rejoice, when we keep our focus on Christ, on all that we have been given in Him that we might enjoy this life on earth while waiting to be taken to heaven. Only when we are focused on God are we able to rejoice in all circumstances.

In **1Thessalonians 5:17**, we are told to "pray without ceasing." Praying is like breathing, and is necessary for a healthy spiritual life, just like proper breathing is necessary for a healthy physical life. Prayer is essential for one who is born of the Spirit of God, for it flows out of our dependence on God.

See **Luke 11:1-4...** The Disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray like John the Baptizer taught his disciples; and although there is no reference in the Bible concerning what John may have taught his disciples to pray, we can be pretty sure that it would have been in accordance with what John knew from the Old Testament Scriptures concerning God, God's Son, and God's Spirit, as they were revealed to him.

Jesus teaches His disciples to revere and worship the Father, to ask Him for their daily provisions, to seek forgiveness for their own sins as they have already

forgiven those who have sinned against them, and that they not fall into the deceptive corruption of sin.

At our drive-up service on June 7, I taught through **Matthew 6:9-13**, commonly know as the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus gives instruction on how we should pray. I took each phrase in that prayer and elaborated on what it means concerning Who we pray to, why we pray to Him, what we are to pray for, and when we are to pray. If you weren't here, or if you just want a refresher on prayer, you may want to go to visit (**fbcwaldport.org**) in order to read, download or listen to that sermon.

See **Luke 11:5-10...** We are told in **Luke 11:3**, that we are to pray to God for our daily bread. And now Jesus uses a parable to teach His disciples something very important about "praying without ceasing."

Whatever you are burdened about, bring it to God in prayer, and continue bringing it to God in prayer until it is resolved (see **Luke 11:9-10**). God responds to persistent prayers, but please know that the priority in this parable, is not for the acquisition or supply of physical bread.

See **Matthew 3:16-4:4...** Although Jesus is definitely hungry after 40 days without food (cf. **4:2-3**), His focus and priority is not on His physical need for bread, but clearly is on the intimate relationship we have with God who provides spiritual food for us through His Word.

The early church made unceasing prayer a priority (**Acts 1:14**), "[They] all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer," (**Acts 2:42**), "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Everything we do is to be aligned with and empowered by obedience to God's Word and Prayer.

During the early weeks after the birth of the church, the Apostles stated their main priority (**Acts 6:4**), "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Our prayer life should be stimulated, inspired, and provoked by the Word of God.

To the believers in Colossae Paul writes (**Colossians 4:2**), "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." He tells the believers in Ephesus that they should be (**Ephesians 5:20**), "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God," and (**Ephesians. 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," and again (**Philippians 4:6**), "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

The emphasis in those passages is that we are not only to revere and honor God with our life, but we must be conscious of God in our heart and mind, being spiritually alert, as we make our requests to Him in prayer, continually, without

ceasing, on behalf of the church, our loved ones, ourself, and the lost. Prayer is as necessary to our spiritual life as breathing is to our physical life.

So, as we have read and studied this morning, God's people, are to be rejoicing and praying continually, at all times, in every situation.

In **1Thessalonians 5:18**, Paul adds a third category of action/attitude that is to be unceasing in our life, and that is to give thanks in everything. So, no matter what happens, without making any excuses or exceptions, we are to be giving thanks to God. Why? Because "this is God's will for [us] in Christ Jesus."

2Peter 1:2-4, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature (**Ephesians 1:13-14; 1Corinthians 12:13**) having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."

We are all (since Adam & Eve) born in sin, deserving death, and yet, God demonstrated His own love for us by taking our punishment, dying in our place. Christ set us free from condemnation, providing forgiveness for our sins (past, present, future), but and eternal life, as children of God through Christ.

Romans 3:10-12, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."

Romans 3:23-24, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (See **Hebrews 10:16-17**)

Romans 10:9-10, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." **13**, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Christians, above all people, should be thankful; and yet, even believers can become unthankful, at times. What causes this? Some of the same unhealthy attitudes and actions that can turn our joy into despair, can also turn our thankfulness into ingratitude: pride, disbelief, disobedience, ignorance of the Scriptures, taking our eyes off of Christ, and failing to be prayerful.

We live in a culture where thankfulness is in decline, and is clearly not an inherent character trait of humanity, nor does it appear to be an attribute that many have been taught, let alone have learned, to express.

As Christians, we should be thankful in everything; and yet many of us are often discouraged and unthankful. We really need to stop focusing on what is going on in the world around us, and instead, we should be focusing on the One who is in us, for He is greater than anyone or anything in the universe: He has both declared and demonstrated that He loves us unconditionally; that He will never leave us or forsake us; and that He has provided everything we need to enjoy this life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

The chaos and confusion caused by Covid-19 is taking its toll on our culture, with all the bad news and bad behavior, the stay-at-home mandates, and the restrictions against intimate group fellowship, where we can encourage one another in Christ. All of this has the propensity to suck the life out of us as individuals, and corporately as God's Church; but only if we allow the man-focused issues and problems in this world to take precedent over all we have been given in and through Christ: God's Word, God's Spirit, God's Family.

Are you reading God's Word daily and praying for God to guide you, strengthen you, comfort you? You need to be encouraged yourself, if you are going to be able to encourage others, during this disconcerting and often discouraging time of pandemic.

Those of you here today are taking advantage of our Sunday drive-in services, bless you! But what about the rest of you who may be reading or listening to this? Have you attended one of our Zoom Bible Studies on Wednesday nights? How about getting a small group of friends together (using physical distancing and face masks) for a sack lunch and prayer time, someplace outside, i.e., at a local park or recreation area near you? Are you calling, texting, emailing your brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage them?

Hebrews 10:23-25, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Only by knowing God's Word and obeying it will you be able to (**1Thessalonians 5:16-18**), Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; [and] give thanks in everything, in accordance with God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Let's Pray...

Pastor Mike
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