

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 – “”

2 Thessalonians has largely been a letter focussed on eschatology. Chapter 2 took us into the day of the Lord and the arrival of the Antichrist. Yet, with much of the focus being on what is to come, Paul ends the letter looking at practical ways for us to be living now. A view of end times must always spur us on to living even more effectively in the present.

Summary Statement:

As believers face opposition and uncertainty, God calls us to pray for the advance of His Word, trust in His faithful protection, and live with hearts directed toward His love and Christlike endurance.

1. Dependence Through Prayer – 1-2

3:1-2 - *Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, ² and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.*

Paul was a man of prayer. He prayed often for the people he was ministering to and writing letters to. He loved to pray and loved to strengthen and encourage others through prayer. He did so at the end of 2 Thessalonians 2. But now in chapter 3, Paul asks for prayer for himself. He did this often as well.

- Though Paul was an apostle and a leader of the church, he never saw himself as too important to need prayer himself. He could have thought, I can't let others see my weakness or vulnerability, I must be strong for them.
- But Paul communicates his need and reliance on prayer. That's an important thing for us to see, because if Paul saw the importance of prayer in his own ministry, how much more must we be reliant on prayer.

Prayer is important because it takes us outside of our ability and puts us on to the Lord's ability. It's saying, I can't do this on my own, I need Your help God. Prayer is not just about rattling off a wish list of needs, it's about communion with God and bringing us into focus of the One who sustains us and carries us through every trial and opposition.

- It's interesting that when Paul prayed for the Thessalonian believers in 2 Thessalonians 1:16-17, though they were going through a time of persecution and trial, he didn't pray for them to be removed or free from

trouble, he prayed that they would be comforted and established in every good word and work.

- In other words, Paul prayed for endurance and patience in the trial. Prayer is not a mechanism to plead for what we want, it's the avenue to be strengthened in what God wants for us.

Now in a similar fashion, look at what Paul is asking prayer for. He's asking that the Word of the Lord would go out with greater impact.

Of all the things that Paul could have asked for in prayer (and I would have probably focused on a few other things that could have helped him out a little more personally) he prays for the Word to ***run swiftly and be glorified!***

Remember where Paul is writing this letter from, he's writing from Corinth. When Paul first came to Corinth it seems he hit a bit of a low point. He's experienced opposition and persecution already but it seems here in Corinth the Lord had to really bring some encouragement and comfort to him: **Acts 18:9-10**, *"Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you..."*

So Paul knows his calling and mission is to speak and not keep silent. What is he to speak? The Gospel, the word of the Lord. This is the truth of who Jesus is. Paul knew this was his very mission as a follower of Jesus.

So he's asking for prayer that this good news of Jesus would not be held back but that it would go forth swiftly.

- Again, here's the leader of the church, a man who has been so faithful and contributed to the spread of Christianity to new countries, a man who met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and he asks for prayer to accomplish this very mission. Paul never got to the place where he felt he was above or beyond prayer. He relied on it.

He'll ask for a similar thing later on in his life. He wrote in **Ephesians 6:19–20**, *"and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."*

Paul showed the importance of prayer, but he also showed his own need for prayer in asking for prayer. And what was his desire? Boldness!! He prayed it twice. I feel maybe like Paul could have asked for help in toning things down a

bit. But he wanted to have even more boldness to proclaim the wonders of this gospel.

It was this boldness that caused him to end up in jail. He's not asking for prayer to get him out! That would have been at the top of my list. He's rather praying for more strength to be used boldly of God.

- This goes to show that Paul wasn't just full of strength on his own, this strength came from the Lord. And he wanted more boldness that was supplied through prayer.
- If Paul is praying that, how much more do I need to do so?

Again, Paul is writing from Corinth, and Corinth was a major city that held the Isthmian games nearby, second only to the Olympics. He's most likely seen the races happening and has this vivid imagery before him. He uses that as a metaphor to speak of his desire to see **the word of the Lord**; the gospel of Jesus Christ, **run swiftly**. In other words, that it would move with a great pace and penetrate people's hearts.

- You know when you're running a race, you want to make sure you have the least amount of impediments. You're not going to be putting on a big backpack with snacks, or a winter coat in case the temperature drops. You're going to make sure that you can run without any hindrance.
- This is Paul's heart. The word **run** in the Greek is *trecho*. He wants to see this gospel get on the right track or trek, and move swiftly. He wants to see this word of the Lord moving along in a manner where it's making steady progress.
- The word 'run' is also in the present tense, speaking of the desire to see the gospel continue on moving forward with great progress.

So Paul's request for prayer is not for himself to be more comforted, but for the gospel to be on the move and that it may **be glorified**.

Now how is the gospel glorified? It's glorified whenever you see the word taking root in a person's heart and bringing about a change of life.

- Paul said that he's *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16)*.
- The gospel contains a power that is able to change lives and bring about a transformation. It leads people out of bondage to sin, and brings them into life in Christ.

So Paul asks for prayer that there would be further reason to rejoice and glory in the work that God does in His word going forth and changing lives.

But then he adds, this is what you experienced yourselves. The word of the Lord came to the Thessalonians and many experienced a change of life.

- **1 Thessalonians 1:5**, *"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake."*
- **1 Thessalonians 2:13**, *"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."*

When you're not sure what to pray, pray that the Word of the Lord runs swiftly; in your life, in my life, through this church, through our community. This is the way things will move in this church, and in our places of living. It's not through strategic planning or the latest trends, it's simply diligence in prayer!

And with this prayer Paul asks to ***be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men***... You can be assured that when the Word of God is going forth, Satan will be there to try and prevent it from moving on. He will have his people that will come challenging it and attempting to hinder it. And we have to remember that these are unreasonable men. They're not interested in hearing or knowing the truth.

- You see, we can attempt to argue with them and try to reveal the truth, but they're unreasonable and wicked. Paul doesn't pray for an open forum or debate with them, but rather to be delivered from them.
- We can often try to argue and defend ourselves, but when we do that, it becomes hard to stop.

As Courson illustrated:

- A man and his son in need of money decided to sell their donkey at the marketplace. The townspeople shook their heads in disgust that the man would make his son walk while he rode the donkey. After hearing the criticism, the man quickly dismounted, and his son got on in his place. As they walked a little farther, they again heard the townspeople murmur, "How could that son be so disrespectful as to make his father walk while he rides the donkey?"

The man then joined his son astride the donkey, only to hear the townspeople down the road say, “How cruel of those two to ride that poor little donkey!” In response, both father and son dismounted the donkey and walked farther, amidst criticism that they were fools for failing to utilize their donkey.

At last, in desperation, the father and son picked the donkey up, and carried it the rest of the way. ¹

The minute we take the position of defending ourselves against those who are not interested in truth, we will find ourselves carrying a burden not meant to be carried.

Notice the issue, **not all have faith**. Not everyone is going to hear the gospel and surrender their lives to Jesus. You wonder sometimes why a person wouldn't, it doesn't make sense to us. But there's a real freedom in letting go of those things and letting the Lord handle it. He will deliver, as Paul points out next:

2. Defense Through God's Faithfulness – 3:3

3:3 - *But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.*

Though there are faithless people out there who may oppose you, **the Lord is faithful**. Don't worry about the wicked and unreasonable people, don't fear when these things happen, put your trust in the Lord because He is faithful. Even when we are faithless, He will be faithful:

- **2 Timothy 2:13**, *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself."*

Not only is He faithful, but He will also **establish you**. There's this word again that we saw in 2 Thessalonians 2:17. It's the Greek word *stērizō*. Kind of like our word steroids. When you feel like you've got nothing to give, or unable to carry out these things, trust the Lord, He's establishing you. He's giving you that extra power. Just tell people you're on the sanctified steroid treatment.

And the Lord is guarding **you from the evil one**. I love that. We can feel like we've got a big target on our back or that we're just getting picked off day by day

¹ Courson, J. (2003). *Jon Courson's Application Commentary* (p. 1359). Thomas Nelson.

by the enemy. But remember, the Lord is at work. He's not relying on you to have it all together, He's establishing you and guarding you. I'm so thankful for that.

3. Direction Toward Love and Endurance – 3:4-5

3:4-5 - *And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. ⁵ Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.*

As Paul passed on the word of the Lord, there were instructions and commands that were being shared. These are all meant to help us live a life that pleases God and is a blessing to us. His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3b).

The things that Paul commanded them were the word of God. This was not about Paul making commands that suited him and helped him. This was passing on the word of God.

And Paul's confidence was not tied to them to carry out these things. Notice, he writes that his confidence is in the Lord. He knows it's the Lord that carries out this work in His people. He establishes them.

Philippians 1:6, *"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;"*

In the rest of this chapter, Paul will go through some areas in the lives of these believers that they will need to carry out through the Lord's help.

Now may the Lord direct your hearts...

This church has been shaken up, they've had some questions and concerns, and what they needed is to have their hearts directed in the love of the Lord. They needed to be reminded of God's love for them. They had undergone persecution and so needed to be reminded that they can be patient in Christ, because He will deliver them.

- This patience speaks of a steadfastness in the Lord; a patience that bears up in spite of persecution.
- The KJV renders this verse, 'And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.'
- There is indeed a peace and a patience that comes for those who are eagerly waiting for the coming of the Lord where we will be with Him always.

Points to Ponder:

1. What am I praying for most – my comfort, or God's cause?

Paul prayed for gospel advancement, not personal ease.

2. Do I trust God's faithfulness more than I fear opposition?

Faithless people may oppose us, but the Lord never abandons us.

3. Am I allowing the Lord to direct my heart daily?

A misdirected heart leads to discouragement; a directed heart leads to peace.