

"Praying for the Church" - 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Our God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. There is nothing that He cannot do. What He decrees, He accomplishes. What He declares ahead of time will inevitably take place. This should be no surprise; consider that He spoke this magnificent universe into existence and sustains it by His powerful word.

Yet God, in His infinite wisdom, has ordained that His perfect will is to be accomplished through secondary means. He is the uncaused Cause of everything, but He allows His people to participate in His continuing plan of redemption. It is a great privilege. God doesn't need us, but He allows us to work alongside Him. He is pleased to use us, to work through us and He uses everything we do, both good and bad, to accomplish His eternal purpose. He is working all things together according to the counsel of His will. (Ephesians 1:11)

Perhaps the most powerful thing we Christians can do is pray. God accomplishes His will by means of Christian prayer. In Revelation, prayer is presented as the incense that is burned before the Almighty as a sweet-smelling aroma.

*Now when [Jesus] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.** (Revelation 5:8)*

God loves our prayers. It is a profound privilege that we can come boldly before the throne of God, bringing our petitions, our heart's desires. We are instructed:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

What a glorious promise! Prayer is powerful!

Now, I cannot imagine anybody offering a prayer that they don't want answered. When you pray, you want God to answer in the affirmative, don't you? Of course, so often we ask for the wrong things. God's got that covered too. When we ask for the wrong stuff, the Holy Spirit intervenes. You can read about that in Romans 8:26.

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8:26)

But if you really want your prayers to be answered in the very best way, you need to pray in accordance with God's perfect will. When you do, your prayer will always be answered in the affirmative. We opened our worship service with that promise this morning:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

So, if you want your prayer life to be especially effective, you need to seek out the perfect will of God and pray accordingly. And guess where you can find God's perfect will? That's right! All scripture is God-breathed! (2 Timothy 3:16)

In our text this morning, we will find out how Paul was praying for the church in Thessalonica and because this letter is part of the canon of scripture, we know he was praying according to God's will. We need to pray in the same way for our church. In fact, we need to pray like this for all churches.

Let's take a look now.

Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

This passage begins with the word "therefore". We always need to ask "What is therefore there for? I'll ask you to remember what we learned last week: Jesus is coming again. He is coming in judgment. He is coming ...

... in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:8)

But for those who do know God, for those of us who do obey the gospel, He is bringing our inheritance. He is bringing our reward.

Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young. (Isaiah 40:10-11)

We shall be vindicated!

Our job in eternity is to glorify Jesus and enjoy Him forever. In the meantime, we need to remember Who we belong to. We need to remember Who we represent in this world. We are called by His name. We are known as **Christians**.

I pray that is the case for everyone here. I hope all of you have heard His voice and responded.

For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, (Psalms 95:7-8)

Just say "yes" to Jesus. Confess to Him that you are a sinner, because all have sinned and fallen short of His glory. (Romans 3:23) Turn from your self-centered foolishness and allow Jesus to be the Lord of your life. He wants nothing but good for you. He loves you so much. He proved His love by dying for you while you were still a sinner. (Romans 8:28) He paid the death penalty for your sin so you would not have to. It is a priceless gift!

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

To receive that gift, all you have to do is believe. As an act of your will, decide to believe what Jesus has done for you.

... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

If you can believe Jesus died for you, if you can submit to His Lordship, if you have tasted the sweet salvation only He can provide, you have been called by God. God chose you and gave you the faith to believe. You need to walk worthy of your faith. That is exactly what Paul prayed for.

Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, (2 Thessalonians 1:11)

Now I want you to notice something: We are not called because we are worthy, but we can be counted worthy because of His calling. When you finally surrender to Jesus, the Spirit of Christ comes to reside within you and He begins this amazing work of sanctification. He is setting you apart for a holy purpose and it is our duty as Christians to cooperate with this work. But make no mistake, it is God's work. It is why Paul prays for it. We can't make it happen by our own effort.

We need to pray for it too: "Oh, God, work in me. Make me worthy of your incredible, gracious calling. Replace my heart of stone with a heart of flesh and write your word indelibly on my very being. I want to please You. I want my life to glorify You."

Don't you want the fullness of God's blessing? Don't you want everything that has been promised to you? Don't you want Him to ... *fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, (2 Thessalonians 1:11)* Pray for it, and then, you can act as if you have already received it because that is the promise of scripture. It is the confidence we have in Him!

Why are you still here? No, I'm not asking why you're here this morning ... I'm asking why you are still on earth? Why didn't Jesus call you home the moment you placed your faith in Him? ometimes, especially when I find myself struggling with sin, I wish He had done exactly that.

We Christians have been left here on this dark and darkening world for a holy purpose.

... that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you ... (2 Thessalonians 1:12)

Glorified in me? That's a heavy weight, Lord! You know what I'm like. I stumble. I fall.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. (Romans 7:15)

We need prayer. I need prayer. If the name of Jesus is to be glorified in my life, I need constant prayer. You do too!

Paul prayed for the church at Thessalonica. He prayed that Jesus would be glorified in them. We should know that ...

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16)

Paul was a righteous man. In Jesus, you too are declared righteous. So, your effective, fervent prayers will avail much.

Pray for our church. Would you make that part of your daily prayer life? Pray that that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in [us]. Is that God's will? Of course it is! And because it is God's will, we can pray with confidence.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Through effective, fervent prayer, I am absolutely convinced that our little church can glorify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is more to Paul's prayer. Look again at verse 12:

*... that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, **and you in Him**, (2 Thessalonians 1:12)*

Tell me that's not incredible! If we are found in Jesus Christ, His glory becomes our glory.

Turn to John, chapter 17. John 17 has been called Jesus' high-priestly prayer. On the same night He was betrayed, Jesus offered this prayer, pouring His heart out to the Father. I want to read you a portion of this prayer, starting with verse 20.

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (John 17:20-21)

If you believe Jesus, He was praying for you. He is praying for you, interceding right now, at the right-hand of the Father. But listen to what He says next:

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: (John 17:22)

Jesus gives us His glory! The very glory that is due the eternal Son of God has been bestowed to us, not because we deserve it but because Jesus deserves it.

But His glory only belongs to us while we remain in Christ.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

We need to pray that our church will find our life in Jesus. We need to stay grafted into the vine. We can't do that in our own strength. We can't do that by our own power. We need to pray for it!

*... that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, **according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ**. (2 Thessalonians 1:12)*

We can glorify Jesus and we can be glorified in Jesus, but only by God's amazing grace, only by His unmerited favor.

Paul prayed for the Thessalonian church. In the same way, we need to pray for Canyon Community Church. We need to pray for the Village Missions Church of the week. If we do so according to God's will, we will pray that we would be counted worthy of His calling, that we would glorify the name of Jesus and that we would be glorified in Him.

Amen!