

Hallmarks of Christian Life and Ministry

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Pastor David Corrente, October 18, 2020

Thank you so much music team for bringing us these songs that we can share together as we come together around the Word of God and I'm grateful to have the opportunity again to be here. If you do not know me or do not recognize me, my name is David Corrente and I pastor Grace Church on 99 in Squamish and we too are a Grace Advance church. One whom shares similar convictions, love the same Christ, love the same gospel, love the same word of God together. And so to be able to step in here for Jeremy, these are the reasons why we have these kinds of relationships, so that we can know that the sheep are always going to be shepherded, that the church is always going to have the word of God clearly within the life of the church. And so, we're praying for your pastor, and we're praying for you, and just thankful for the ministry we can share together. We're just grateful to be here. If you have your Bibles with you, and I pray that you do, turn to First Thessalonians chapter five. First Thessalonians chapter five. We're going to be in verses 16 to 18 this morning.

Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica. Starting at verse 16,

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we come before you I pray as we have sung already, looking forward to the day where we will be face to face with our king, with Christ Himself. And as we live through what you have given us on this earth as a great commission to be the church, Lord, may we be bound to your word. May we be humbled by it as faithful representatives and witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. May your people look more like Christ today, after hearing your word. In your Son's precious and holy name, we ask. Amen.

Earlier this summer, I'm sure as many of you have experienced, your plans had to change. You probably had something to do this summer, somewhere to go, maybe international traveling and it was stopped. I myself had to experience the same thing. But thankfully, I have family in Canada, and we had the opportunity to experience an Alberta Ranch. I got to go to my brother in law's uncle's ranch and received one of those experiential educations. Not sure how many cattle they have in total, but from what they told us they had nearly 200 cattle birthed this year. Now there's a lot of land out there in Alberta as I experienced as I was driving. It just didn't seem to end. Every year cattle come into the world on this ranch, and they set out on these endless fields of the prairie lands. And the reality is there's many ranches out there with many lands. How do you mark out these cattle? Well, every year, an event takes place that multiple people come, and exhausting effort. And maybe you even experienced it around here. It's branding day. It is a mark that is given to these cattle so that as they wander out into the pasture lands in the fields, they know whom these cattle do belong to. It's not any question. The brand sets them apart from all the other ranches so that there is no confusion.

The Christian ought to be marked in that same way. There ought to be something that sets them apart from the world when the world experiences very similar things. Would you be able to mark out the Christian if a Christian and an unbeliever were going through the exact same set of circumstances? Would you be able to tell the difference between the Christian who handles that circumstance; something that's done to them, something that's evidence, something that comes out of their mouth, something of their disposition, something of their countenance? They're walking through something very difficult, or maybe some sort of triumph, something's

going really well, but they in turn, respond differently. It shouldn't confuse or be confused with any other worldview, the way that a believer responds to any circumstance in life given to them by the providence of the Lord. We have instructions to help us and that's what brings us to our passage this morning where we can see certain qualities, certain dispositions, certain makeup of a believer as you are walking through life and what the Lord has given you.

Thessalonica would have been a very difficult place to stand out like this, but the church in Thessalonica did. It's a large Metropolis area connected and a harbor to the Aegean Sea. Many major historical figures such as Aristotle, Alexander the Great, are from there, which gave them a certain political clout, giving them a certain air about them. It's in Greece now, but in biblical times, it was in the area of Macedonia. It's a very interesting city because even at that time, Thessalonica was much more like a democracy, the way that they could handle their city. Rome still governed them. But it was a port city so that the freedoms that they had, brought in many different religions, brought in different worldviews, brought in different economics, different ideologies, where this people of Thessalonica might want to cling themselves to.

But as we read in Acts 17, Paul, Silas and Timothy came during a second missionary journey through the Macedonian vision and the church at Thessalonica, after they went to Philippi, was birthed. After Philippi, they went to Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth, and through these three men, the birth of the church in Thessalonica occurred. This is a church in its infancy. This is a church that would have no real understanding of the Christian faith. They didn't have the Old Testament Scriptures just ready. They didn't have generations, maybe like some of you do in your past, of believers that have passed down the scriptures to them. The Church of Thessalonica was in its infancy, not just as a church, but just in the faith. It wasn't very long there. But they are already, even going back to chapter one, how Paul was saying, from you the Word of God, the gospel is being sounded forth all the way through this area. It was evident that the gospel in Christ was being proclaimed, and that they took the word seriously. In chapter two it says, when we came to you, you recognized that although we were just mere men, what we spoke was ensured the Word of God. There's a sweetness to this letter and the Lord used this church mightily at such a young age. And at the end of this letter, he gives in rapid fire succession, these brands, or what I'm going to call hallmarks, hallmarks in life and Christian ministry.

A hallmark is like a stamp. It's like a brand. A hallmark is what distinguishes something as genuine. A hallmark is something that indicates origin or authenticity. It marks out particular traits for somebody or something, so you know exactly what it is and where it came from. So, Paul gives these hallmarks in this particular section. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; and in everything give thanks. These are three commands. These are imperative commands, so it is not something that you're just thinking about. It's not just something that's going to bubble up inside of you. This is a volition of your will to choose how God instructs you to respond in any given circumstance. By the power of the Holy Spirit a believer can humbly bend their will, through whatever circumstance in obedience to these instructions. They are not just fleeting emotions or feelings in any given circumstance. As one of my mentors has said, imperatives or commands in the Bible are reminders of what you're not really wanting to do in a situation but what God calls you to do in a situation. He said, you can know by imperative commands, what you will naturally drift away from, in a moment when God is causing you to believe and calling you to believe his Scriptures. And I say life and ministry because yes, these may be individual pursuits, but they are collectively experienced in the church. You may be going through a difficult time and as a church, you come around that person and you remind them of these truths, or even within your home. Because these are plural imperatives, meaning the whole church is being addressed. It is not just in the singular form, it is

you all as a church, be rejoicing, always be praying unceasingly and be always giving thanks, for this is your will in Christ Jesus.

Now to look at the entire context, if you just go back in chapter five and verse 12. These are reminders again for a new church of what it means within the life of their church. In verses 12 to 13, they are to appreciate the leadership and those who diligently labor. They wouldn't have really understood that, as you can understand, as a free society and as one who worships multiple idols, the reality of coming under authority in the life of the church probably would have been foreign to them. Yes, they would have understood Roman rule, but in terms of religious authority that grants diligent work to them as their labors, it would have been new to them.

Verse 14 and 15,

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

These are essentially the one another's just kind of wrapped up very cleanly and precisely for this young church. That they will know that they're not supposed to respond with evil back to someone else. They're not supposed to get their pound of flesh, they're not supposed to act in their old ways that they would have under another worldview, ideology or religion. And then they come to these three hallmarks. These three hallmarks.

Here's our first hallmark of Christian life and ministry, supernatural joy. Supernatural joy. Verse 16; Rejoice always! A very short verse, a very plain verse. It doesn't take seminary to interpret this. Rejoice always. Rejoicing always is a heavenly disposition within a circumstance. It is a transcendent joy. It is something you have within an experience; joyfulness, gladness, rest in God, in where God has you and where God is taking you in a moment. As we understand from Galatians chapter five, Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. This is something that the Holy Spirit gets inside of you, to see what you can look at in a circumstance with eternal optimism. Not just optimism for optimism sake, but it enables your countenance, your disposition, your inner life, to look at a circumstance no matter how dire, no matter how difficult, to see something through the lens of eternity within that circumstance. And it uplifts you. It grants you a disposition, where you know God is being glorified. Where God's word is being exalted. We often connect or maybe it's better said, confuse our understanding of joy, with emotion, with just sheer happiness that happens at any given moment of bliss or satisfaction. And yes, to some degree, there will be that. But there is immense persecution in this church. They're new believers, who are having their lives lifted upside down because of their newly found faith in Christ. And they're probably questioning a lot of things right now. Why they believe what they believe. The world now starts to come against them. The realities of their life have been totally upside down and been changed because of their faith in Christ. And Paul says, rejoice. Look to the supernatural joy brought by the Holy Spirit. Because it's not that God doesn't understand our suffering. It's not that he doesn't understand life within a cursed world. God Himself through the second person of the trinity, Jesus Christ, came in and walked through our infirmities. He understood more than anyone else. And God himself has experienced more suffering than you and I collectively, will and have ever experienced. Eternal joy is more so connected to our thoughts, our beliefs, and our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ through whatever he brings in our lives. We're called to weep with those who weep. Tragedies occur. Sin cursed world brings unimaginable struggles and life can come down on us in a way that puts certain pressure on our faith, and joy has the trust in God, who is God, who responds to your circumstance as God, will never leave you nor forsake you. He is on his

throne and the promises of His Word will remain eternally true. It's a different kind of worldview. So again, go back to our example. A Christian and non-Christian are going through the exact same experience. What's the Hallmark there? Supernatural joy! In First Thessalonians chapter one, Paul says that they received the word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit. So, they experienced it immediately. How many of you upon receiving faith in Christ, within the first couple of weeks of your faith, received unimaginable persecution?

Paul, going through the Greco Roman world was being dragged out of cities. That's what they saw. That's what they saw in their shepherd. Like Paul in Colossians 1, verse 24, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. First Peter 1, verse 6. In this, you greatly rejoice, even now, for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials. Paul and Peter are saying, in your trials, you can greatly rejoice. How many of us greatly rejoice when we're out of a trial? When we want to just get through it, we get more relief when we're done with a trial, than joy. Jesus Himself is our example. And Hebrews 12, verse 3 says for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame. This was before the cross, before the agony. This was before the pain. This is before all of the shame of being rejected by the world, and his own disciples scattered. For the joy set before him, he endured the shame of the cross. He could look into the circumstance that would bring him the most shame, the most difficulty, the most pain, even the turning of the back of the Father. And he saw it with joy. It's a hallmark to the world, that a believer or a church experiencing trial, walk through something together. And there's this otherworldly supernatural joy where the world looks kind of confused, that you responded the way that you responded. It doesn't mean you have to walk around with a smiley face all the time. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about an internal joy and heavenly disposition that's in stark contrast to the world. It's a peculiar way for you to walk through a very difficult time.

Secondly, our second hallmark of Christian life and ministry is verse 17, pray without ceasing. Pray without ceasing, again, very short verse, very simple, doesn't take too long to understand it. But how hard is it to bring into your life in a particular way? This is that standard word for prayer. It includes everything from praise and adoration, petition, confession, all the things that we've even experienced here this morning. Prayer is that humble dependence of a believer on their God. Prayer is exposing ultimately where you put your trust in a circumstance, where you put your trust in the daily course of life. And you're supposed to do it always or unceasingly here. Now, that comes to that obvious question, what does unceasingly mean? Does it mean every single second of the day, every moment? If you're not praying, are you sinning? What is Paul trying to help us understand? What Paul is trying to help all of us understand is the readiness of your heart and soul and mind to be in communication with your heavenly Father at any moment. You recognize your need to depend on God and develop your relationship with your God, that you don't become too prideful because things are going well, or you don't get too much self-pity because things aren't going well at any given moment. Your kind of reaction in that moment would actually be, I must go to God. God knows about this. God knows what he's doing. I don't know what's happening in this circumstance, but I know my God does. What moment of the day are you really willing to confess that you do not need your God? And that we need to depend on him all the more. Yes, it is wonderful to have your times where you set out in the morning, evening, maybe you're on the Daniel prayer plan three times a day at a specific time. Wonderful! Those are all good and necessary. This is just the ready heart, the transparent heart that is ready to go to their God knowing that one cannot exhaust the ear of God. No one can overwhelm the care of God as their father. No one can give God more burdens than what he can handle and is worthy of every praise and every adoration you give back to him because of it.

Jesus gave us the parable, the widow and the unjust judge that just kept on going. Hebrews tells us to boldly go before the throne of grace. JC Ryle even says that a lack of prayer should even give one pause to the consideration of their salvation with this simple question. Do you pray? Do you take the benefit of the Lord Jesus Christ giving you access to the throne of God in any given way, circumstance, time, no matter what you're feeling, no matter what you're going through, no matter what mode of state that you have in that moment? Prayer to the believer, and prayer to the church ought to be as natural as breathing air to the human body. It's what it lives off of. It's dependent upon it. If the human body does not get air, within seconds, everything about the body starts to go into chaos. If we stop breathing, our world stops, everything changes. If we stop praying, we should experience the same kind of feelings. I wish the Lord put in some sort of spiritual mechanism, some spiritual life that started to go out of us. But I think it does take time for that to ultimately happen. When we are together as the church and you're going through certain circumstances, you're getting together with a disciple and you're going through a certain circumstance, one of the first things that ought to be on our minds and hearts is have we prayed about this? Have you prayed about this? Have you gone to your God in dependence? If we stopped praying, we ought to experience the same disorientation, the same spiritual disorientation as if oxygen wasn't getting to our brain in a physical nature. And it's so important to understand as we're going to our God, although he does absolutely care for our physical needs, and for our physical circumstances. Read the prayers of Paul. What is he ultimately praying for the churches? What is he praying for, for the believers that he has come into contact with? And what are you to be praying about? These spiritual realities that drive your life. God knows all of our physical needs, he understands all of them, and he takes care of all of our physical needs. But we should never just leave our prayer life at the physical realm of things.

All throughout the scriptures. You see the prayer to be strengthened, to endure faithfully, to be humble and submit to God, that his word would instruct and convict and comfort, that there would be wisdom in responses, that there would be patience to endure, that his will would be done, that Christ would receive maximum glory. What are the contents of our prayer? Are they intensely spiritual in ways that only God can actually come into a circumstance, come into a scenario and do his goodwill?

Pray without ceasing. At any moment, at any time, depending on your God in whatever circumstance. It ought not to be foreign to a believer or a group of believers to just say, hey, let's pray about this. It ought to be expected. It ought to be hoped for. Because like Peter said, where else can we go? You have the words of eternal life, our Father, through Christ, through the humility of the Spirit. A hallmark of a church is a church that prays. A church that prays together, willingly and humbly. First hallmark of Christian life and ministry was supernatural joy. Second Hallmark in ministry is persevering prayer. Third Hallmark in ministry is a consuming thankfulness.

Third hallmark of Christian life and ministry is consuming thankfulness. Thankfulness is that expression of gratitude when somebody has done something for you that you could not have done on your own at that moment. It's like a personal indebtedness. You have done something for me and therefore I owe it to you to do something back for you. It is interesting, in one of the lexicons that I studied earlier for this passage, it is known in other languages that when you say thank you, you say God repay you, or may God repay you. There's this reality of knowing that I have received something from you that I cannot give back to you, so only the divine. I'm not sure if it was a Christian or somebody like that, that put that in there, but may God repay you. Somebody outside of myself can have the ability to do that which I cannot otherwise do. That should be assumed here even in this passage, that it is God ultimately that you are giving thanks to, that the church in Thessalonica ought to give thanks to, for what he has done for us because he does everything for us. Even John in John chapter three says

that nobody has anything on earth except from what God has given to him, so we must recognize that everything; the breath that you have right now, the beating of your heart, every single resource that you have right now is given to you by God. Paul in his letters has expressed thanksgiving to God for the believers in a particular place so it is not that we cannot be thankful for other believers; be thankful for one another. But the reality is, the focus is God Himself. If it were not for God, you wouldn't be a part of this city, the fabric, the church, the relationships that you've been taking part in. Paul, even in Philippians, places both prayer and thankfulness together.

Philippians four, verse six, do not be anxious about anything but by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. It is so easy for the concerns of life to consume us. Not thankfulness, but just our daily responsibilities. Days can be long, responsibilities can pile up, expectations sometimes are not met the way that we want them to be met. But look down to the text, it is very important; in everything, in everything. Everything about that circumstance, everything about that situation, not just in some things, not just in most things, or in the things that I like about the situation, I'm going to give thanks for everything. Everything about that circumstance, whether it's the people involved, whether you're going through a difficult time because of the people involved or not or whatever God is testing you or whatever God is teaching you in a moment.

What Paul is wanting the Thessalonican church to be encouraged by is to even make a skill set out of it, to be on the lookout, to be on the high tower so to speak, of all the ways that in one circumstance they're in or another, that they can be thankful for and just list them off. And I think as the Thessalonican church would do, as well as we would, to realize we have so much more to be grateful for and how the cares of life can consume us, instead of the thankfulness towards God. And we fight the good fight of faith. We discern where we're anxious, we're discerning where we are not dependent in prayer and we are not persevering in prayer and where we are not rejoicing. Paul says this can only ultimately come from God because remember, Romans chapter one, Paul says one of the ways that the unbelieving world is distinct from believers is, they don't thank God. They don't thank God.

So three hallmarks of the Christian life and ministry are supernatural joy, persevering prayer, and consuming thankfulness. But look how verse 18 ends, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. I understand that it's immediately connected to verse 17 but you could just say, rejoice always for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus, pray without ceasing for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. You can wrap all of these three hallmarks within God's will: his intention, his desire. He wants you in the state of your inner life, no matter what you're walking through, to have this brand, this Hallmark to show the genuineness of faith, the authenticity, the origin of your faith, coming from God and God alone.

If you've ever wondered what God's will is, or sat beside someone in dust and ashes, and they asked, what is God's will in all of this? You're now equipped. You may not know anything of the situation whatsoever. You may not know what God is doing, he may not have revealed it to you, but you can sit down with them. And you can say, this I know, this is God's will for you; rejoice, pray, be thankful. We can accomplish all of these things faithfully through Christ. This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. This is such sweet language because he gave you the reason for true rejoicing. You guys are celebrating the cup, we're celebrating the cup together. We can rejoice because of what he has done and given us access to God. He has washed you; he has cleansed you; he has taken your place; you have salvation through him. All of your spiritual needs are cared for. Your bank account is covered.

So why not rejoice? Is there really anything in this life that can take away your joy?

Any earthly circumstance that can take eternity away from you through Christ? No, because Christ says they're mine. I never lose any of mine. He alone has given you access to the Father. He's your advocate; the father's right hand. Your prayers are interpreted by the Spirit, according to Romans eight, and the Trinity works collectively on your behalf as you approach the throne of grace so that your unceasing requests are brought before the Almighty. It's through Christ that you can actually pray. It's through Christ that you have access to God. That should give you all the confidence in the world. He's sitting right beside him. He's the closest one to the Father. In Christ, thankfulness can consume all that we think, all that we accomplish, because he never leaves us. Because he never forsakes us. Because we are never alone. And we can be utterly content in all that God has given us. He has done that on our behalf.

In Christ, we have a new lens by which we see the world and all of our circumstances. That ought to set us apart from everything and it ought to be obvious within our hearts. Not that we're not going to struggle with these things and not that we're going to wrestle our will to the ground to get these things done by the power of the Spirit, but we can accomplish these things through Christ.

I want to bring an example that happened this past week. And please forgive me because I don't think I'm going to get through it very well. A good friend of mine, a pastor friend in Tempe, Arizona. One of his pastoral staff was on vacation this past week on Monday and through the tragic providence of the Lord he accidentally ran over his son and killed him. What about this verse? What about rejoicing always? What about prayer without ceasing? What about in everything give thanks. One of the most dark providences a parent could ever think of on this earth. And I want to read to you what he wrote his church. He wrote this week to his church and to the church at large.

My cry while performing CPR is our cry today. We know God is good. We dare not ask God to bend his will to ours but rather ask that he bend our will to his, even if that means being broken and crushed. For the tender mending care of our loving Shepherd is precious to us.

We will not reject the anguish, for in the depths of our anguish are the mountains of his comfort. And we do not fight against our sorrows, for the intensity of each sorrow is a testimony to how precious our Caleb was to us, and how intense our love was for him. Both of these graces are graces from God to us. We thank God for the undeserved blessing it was to be with Caleb for five years, nine months and 20 days. Each moment with him was an indescribable gift. He brought such joy to our lives and sweet energy to our home. We do not need answers to why beyond what our sovereign God has given us in His Word, for in His Word, is every answer we need. And his word is more precious to us than all the riches of the world, even more than the riches of parenthood. What else would we need and where else would we go than into the loving arms of our Savior? Our great God has provided for our biggest need in the forgiveness of sins through the death of his own son. With that precious truth in mind, we dare not question his love. How could we? Rather we cling to him. You all have been means of God's loving care to us. And for that we thank you and worship Him. We know God is sovereign, and there is no better place for us than where he has us today. We trust, we yield, we mourn, we bless his name. And through the tears that constantly fall, we fall on our faces and worship. Blessed is the name of the Lord.

What a hallmark of faith, to go through such dire tragic circumstances that is different than every single thing the world can offer. If you have time this week, please be praying for the Kelso family. Such hallmarks of faith.

What's the opposite, beloved? Let's diagnose the opposite just for a moment here. If these are the hallmarks of faith, if these are the ways that distinguish us, what ways ought we potentially go backwards or be more like the world?

Well, in one way, it's grumbling. We grumble. We grumble at our circumstances. Grumbling at the core is complaining. It is complaining about our circumstances. It is a lack of trust in God. One dictionary says it's behind the scenes talk. And it's just really interesting, because what it's indicating is that there's a scene out in front on stage, and you're behind the stage. And you're judging what's going out on the stage behind the scenes so that nobody else can hear what's going on. Is that us in our hearts sometimes when God has us in a circumstance and in our hearts there's a behind the scenes talk of questioning God and wondering what God is doing and wondering if he loves us and wondering if his promises are true? Many times, we fail to see grumbling from God's perspective. Whether we cry it out loud in our hearts or not. We say that's not fair. I deserve better than this. I should not be treated this way. God, don't you know what these people have caused me? God, don't you know what the situation is and how it's hurting me. I'm not getting my way and what I want and you're keeping something from me. That's grumbling. We see it in our homes every day. Lord willing, not from the parents. Remember how severely punished and judged Israel was for grumbling just because they wanted more fruit and vegetables from Egypt? They had redemption. God saved them out of slavery, and they wanted a couple more onions. How ridiculous that looks to our God. How ridiculous that looks to our salvation, what the cost was to our Christ. That any complaining and any grumbling no matter if it's to human people, it is ultimately against God, because he is the one that puts you there. He's the one that's providentially caring for you in that moment. He's the one that's sovereign over that moment. He's the one that's giving you truth. He's the one that's giving you redemption. He's the one that is giving you hope. And you can see how the opposite happens here. If you don't rejoice, you're probably going to grumble. You're probably going to question God about your station in life at that point. Therefore, you're going to turn inward to find some sense of joy. You're going to try to depend on yourself. Prayer is probably going to go out the window. You're going to try to find some sort of rejoicing or satisfaction or something in the world. And instead of thankfulness, self-pity is going to set in, guardrails are going to go up, separation from the body, separation from truth, separation from God's Word is probably going to happen. And it's going to take a two by four, for the Lord to straighten you up. So, we see when we do rejoice, we recognize where we ought to be; dependent upon God Himself, and how thankful we ought to be. We're not going to be joyful and prayerful and thankful if we lack faith. If we don't understand God's character, if we don't trust God and His plan, His promises. And if we lack instruction from God's word, we lack focus on eternal realities. If we have an overestimation of our own opinion and our own perception, or if we're overly concerned with worldly things, those things are going to overwhelm us. So how can we continue to rejoice? How can we be prayerful? How can we be thankful?

The remedy is the opposite of those things. Know God and His character because His character is everything you cling to in that moment. Trust the Lord and His promises. They're eternal. They superintend and transcend the circumstance. Grow in knowing God's Word so that you can believe truth in that moment, and you don't turn inward, and you don't turn to worldly things for satisfaction in that moment. Even if you don't know how to respond, or you don't know what God is doing in that moment, let the secret things of the Lord be the secret things. But what he has revealed to you, you be accountable for. Keep asking yourself what God is teaching you and remind yourselves of the truths anchoring your soul. Be quick and be humble to shed your perspective if God's Word and His wisdom immediately corrects you. Or if a brother or sister in Christ comes and says, here's

what God says about that situation, humbly receive it. Be thankful, pray with them, and rejoice. And all throughout the responsibilities every single day, remember that they're from the Lord, the graces of our life. They don't ultimately define us. Our trials don't ultimately define us. Our lives or relationships don't ultimately define us. Christ defines us; he marks us out. But through all of these responsibilities, through all these relationships, this defining mark, these hallmarks can set us apart and to allow us, like the church in Thessalonica, be shining lights throughout the world so that they can know what rules over you. Why do you respond that way? And you have an on ramp to the gospel. You have an on ramp to hope. The church is encouraged, the church is built up, believers are made more like Christ through these hallmarks in ways that nothing else can. Supernatural joy, persevering prayer, and consuming thankfulness; God's will in the Lord Jesus Christ. Is that a hallmark of your life in this church?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, what precious truths that you have given us. I pray that we cry out like Peter, where else can we go? Why would we ever leave Christ's side? What is it in our lives that would desire us to not cling to him with every fiber of our being?

Christ is worthy. He's worthy to rejoice in. He is worthy to have access to the throne of grace. He is worthy to have unending thankfulness. Our sins are forgiven. Our debt is paid. We're in Christ.

Father, I pray for this church specifically, that these hallmarks would be like a branding iron so that the world may know what Christ they serve, what God they serve. There are many in here that are going through individual burdens, Lord, that may be very difficult to bear and I pray that these words comfort them. I pray that your truth and your word give them immediate access to hope. Father, we pray for the Kelso family. We thank you for the mark of faith that you've put on them and pray as they continue to strive in their faith, their very difficult circumstance. And may their witness and their testimony, like it has for us, strengthen the saints. Father, may Your will be done.

We thank you, through the only name that we can name and salvation through Christ Himself. Amen.