

Preaching- Sunday 26th September

Paul's Final Advice

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

Intro and Set Scene

- Morning everyone.
- It has been so good to 'gather' in person in the building and then 'go' during this month in September.
- Last week Pastor Steve preached on 'Here I am' and how God is calling us to be holy and sent out.
- Today we are looking at 'Paul's Final Advice' in the letter, 1 Thessalonians.
- In the New Testament we have these letters of advice and encouragement that are written to the early churches that were formed when people started following Jesus.
- Letters were Paul and the apostles' way of keeping in touch with the Christians that they had discipled across Europe and Asia.
- They didn't have Wifi or FaceTime 2,000 years ago and so this was the main form of communication.
- Here, Paul is writing to the church in a place called Thessalonica.
- For those of you who like to know where things are, Thessalonica was an ancient city in Northern Greece.
- The best way to read these letters is to read them in one go, which is how they were intended to be read.
- When I was preparing for this message, even though we are just going to focus on one passage, I read the whole of 1 Thessalonians and you get a feel for who Paul was writing to and what their situation was.
- Some of the back story is that Paul and Silas went to this place, preached the Gospel and people came to know Jesus. They formed a Christian community there but faced trouble from those who accused them of worshiping Jesus as King instead of looking to Caesar as king.
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6 tells us that the church in Thessalonica received the Gospel amidst severe suffering with joy given by the Holy Spirit.
- This letter is Paul reconnecting with the Christians there to celebrate their growth and to challenge them to keep going.
- It's a bit like when you receive a half time pep talk.
- The coach gathers everyone around to encourage them to keep going, focus on what they are doing well and what they might need to change.
- I like to think that Paul's letters were similar to pep talks by your coach and that his advice can still challenge and encourage us today.

Read- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22.

1) Rejoice Always- verse 16

- I don't know whether you have ever been in a challenging situation and then someone comes along and says, 'cheer up, everything will be ok.' When you are experiencing challenges, sometimes I find that the last thing you want to hear from someone is, 'cheer up.' You might just want someone to sympathise with you.
- In verse 16, Paul speaks to the church's situation amidst persecution and he says 'rejoice always.'
- To rejoice means 'to feel or show great joy or delight.'
- You might wonder how is this possible?
- The incredible paradox of our faith and life as Jesus followers is that it is possible to rejoice always, even when facing great persecution and challenges.
- There is a promise and the possibility as believers that we can rejoice in every circumstance, because of the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- It is not a shallow, superficial joy.
- It is not a joy that pretends that everything is ok, but it's a deep, genuine, supernatural joy that in the midst of your circumstances causes you to rejoice.
- I believe that for some people listening today, God is saying to you through this passage that you can rejoice always too.
- It's not that your pain or your situation doesn't matter, but that **He** will enable you to rejoice by his Spirit living in you.
- God says, 'rejoice and take delight in Me.'
- Psalm 126 says 'those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.'
- Our God can turn our mourning into dancing and our sorrow into joy.
- I believe that there is a call to authentic Christianity that recognises and acknowledges suffering, yet like Paul and the early church did, are able to rejoice always, not just when life is great.
- We rejoice in who God is.
- We rejoice in His goodness, His love, His faithfulness.
- We rejoice because His mercies are new every morning and his compassions never cease.
- We rejoice because He calls us His children.
- We rejoice because He has plans for good for us and not to harm us.
- We rejoice because He offers us hope.
- We rejoice because Christ died for us and now we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6).
- We rejoice because by His stripes we are healed.
- When we rejoice and take delight in Him, we are filled with a new strength.

- I don't know what your situation is today but I believe that, just as Paul's Final Advice to this church facing trouble and persecution 2,000 years ago was to rejoice, we can also apply this today.
- God will enable us to rejoice and as we fix our eyes onto Him, we find that there is much to rejoice in.

2) Pray continually- verse 17.

- To pray continually or unceasingly means not to stop.
- It is a constant attitude of intercession.
- A constant turning our attention towards God's matters and purposes.
- It means we are intentional with our prayer life.
- Pete Greig who started the 24/7 prayer movement says, *'everyone prays. Even non-Christians pray. The difference when Christians do it is that they are climbing into the lap of their Heavenly Father.'*
- What a privilege it is to be able to dialogue regularly, continually with the Living God, our Heavenly Father.
- In the Old Testament there were so many regulations to follow in order to meet with God yet now, because of what Jesus has done for us, we may enter boldly and freely into God's presence (Ephesians 3:12) through prayer.
- When I was 19 I recommitted my life to God and one of the things that awakened in me was a passion for prayer. I had revelation of how profound prayer was and it used to bother me that people didn't seem to care so much about it.
- To believe that we could change and affect the atmosphere and the world through prayer and intercession just blew my mind, as well as connecting with God personally.
- I was on the Student Committee at my Bible College as the Prayer Secretary.
- I would organise prayer gatherings and struggle to get 10 people to attend, yet when others on the Committee organised socials or 'fun' events loads of people would turn up.
- I remember wondering how people couldn't grasp the importance of prayer, yet if I am honest as the years have gone by, I wonder whether my own passion for prayer has waned.
- Life gets busy, you have a 9-5 and then evening commitments and you are trying to fit everything in and sometimes, maybe prayer can take a back seat.
- How is your passion for prayer?
- Has it become something that we take for granted?
- This September I have re-set my prayer life and started a new prayer hub slot and I want to prioritise prayer in my life again.
- We can set aside specific times of prayer, yet outside of those times we are encouraged to have a prayerful attitude, an ear and a heart that is turned towards the Lord.

- Josh and I have recently, finally moved house. On our moving day, it was a real disappointment to find out that our sofa wouldn't fit through our living room door! So we put it in the back room and we are still figuring out what to do with it. But even in this small situation, we wanted to pray and ask God for wisdom. Actually, Father God, what do we do, even in this small matter of a sofa!
- To pray continually, I believe, means in every situation to be turned towards God and what He might be saying. Even if you are asking God what to do with a sofa! Maybe you are considering small or big life decisions- pray continually and invite God into it.
- Philippians 4:6 says, 'do not be anxious about anything, but in **every** situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'
- Knowing God relationally through prayer is something we are privileged to be able to do.
- Recently, Josh bought a bike from someone on eBay and we went to their house to pick it up. We got there and you could sense that he needed a bit of encouragement and was maybe in need. As we were leaving, Josh asked if we could pray for him. The man said yes and then he said something that really struck me- he said, 'do you think that will make a difference?'
- Do we, as Christians, really believe that prayer will make a difference?
- People are in need today and they are asking, will Jesus really make a difference? Will prayer really make a difference?
- The answer is yes, Jesus will make a difference, prayer will make a difference, **if** we will live a lifestyle of prayer...
- People need to know that there is hope. The world needs us as Christians to be Jesus followers who practise what we preach. Who rejoice always, who pray continually and who naturally, out of that way of life, pass it on to those around us.
- It's not just that we have a regular Wednesday prayer slot in the prayer Hub, although that is so important too. It's that we are always thinking about prayer, willing to pray, whether it is personally or for the people around us.
- When I have catch ups with my friends, whether in person or on the phone, I try to pray at the end of the call.
- Let us be Jesus people who rejoice always, pray continually and thirdly, give thanks in all circumstances.

3) Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus- verse 18

- Again, it seems paradoxical to me that Paul can say to these Christians, 'I know you are in trouble but remember, give thanks in all circumstances!'
- Something that Josh and I do every evening at dinner is sit down and share something we are thankful for that day.
- Even when we have had a hard day, we find something to be thankful for. Sometimes it might just be the food we are about to eat!
- There is a real value and power in thanksgiving.

- AW Tozer said- 'gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God and it is one that the poorest of us can make and not be poorer but richer for having made.'
- I love this idea that our gratitude is an offering to God.
- Our thanksgiving is something we offer to Him out of our love for Him.
- I love it when people thank me- it makes me feel honoured.
- If we are to believe that everything belongs to God (Psalm 24) and that all we have comes from Him, how much he must love it when we thank him for what he has given us.
- I want to encourage us today to think of our gratitude as being an offering to our Heavenly Father.
- That our thankfulness is a way of worshiping him.
- Psalm 100 says that we enter God's gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.

Key Takeaways:

- The reason that we rejoice always, pray continually and give thanks is because it is God's will for us in Christ Jesus.
- It is the way that God wants us to live our lives and it will spill out to the people around us.
- So how do we do it?

1) Invite the Holy Spirit to enable you to rejoice.

- When the Holy Spirit gives us joy, we will truly be able to rejoice always.
- Today you may feel like you have no reason to rejoice.
- Can I encourage you to fix your eyes on Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with a revelation of His love for you.
- Let us also watch how we speak and rejoice with our language. For example, in how we speak of others and how we view situations.
- You know what it's like to be around someone who always finds something to complain about. Let us rejoice and find delight in God...
- Speak the best about others and situations...

- 2) Be intentional with prayer.

- Set intentional time aside time in your day and invite God into your situations.
- Before a meeting or during a meeting or at the end of a meeting, pray! Whether it's out loud or in your own heart.
- Look for opportunities to pray with others in your every day. The more we do this, the more it will become part of our lifestyle.
- Join/re-establish your prayer slot. There are WhatsApp groups where those who are praying sign in and share Scripture verses. Can I encourage you today to join in?

- 3) Worship God with thanksgiving.

- Have some time in your day where you sit and reflect on what you are thankful for. Maybe it will be at dinner in the evening or maybe before you go to bed.
- Write a list of 10 things that day you are thankful for.
- Worship God with your gratitude.
- View your thanksgiving as an offering to Him. Psalm-

Paul's final advice still applies to us today- to rejoice always, pray continually and give thanks in every circumstance. May we be Jesus people who live our lives in such a way that it is evident to our families, friends and neighbours that there is something supernatural about our lifestyle.

Pray to close.