

at verses 11 through 13. Again, our sermon text this morning is from 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, reading verses 11 through 13. Our big picture outline as we've been walking through the book of Thessalonians is kind of centered on four major headings. We said the first chapter, we gave thanksgiving, as Paul thanks God for the work that has happened in Thessalonica. Then we move to explanation, which is very biographical. Paul explaining the situation while they were at Thessalonica, answering some objections to his ministry, and also why he hasn't been there since he left.

And then later we're going to move into exhortation, and finally into consolation. We have thanksgiving, explanation, exhortation, and consolation. So today, we're going to be moving out of the explanation section and into the exhortation section. And just like last time, as Paul moves from one section of a letter to another, he transitions by means of a prayer.

And so here, you're gonna see some of the themes that we've already talked about echoed in this prayer. Some of the things he's been talking about. Way the Lord direct our way to you and so forth. But you're also gonna see a lot of the themes that he's about to get to. A lot of the exhortation and consolation that he's about to offer. So be on the lookout for that as we read this text together. But before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Our Father and our God, as we open up your word, we pray that what we know not, you'd teach us. What we have not, give us. And what we are not, make us.

For the sake of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Reading from 1 Thessalonians 3, beginning at verse 11. Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you. So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. This is the word of the Lord. May he add his blessing to it.

Whether you're looking at a counseling situation or addiction or whatever it might be, if you ever want to accomplish life change, especially if you're trying to convince someone else to make a life change, there's really three things you need to convince that person of. And anyone who's in counseling, anyone who's dealt with addiction could tell you this.

First thing the person needs to be convinced of is that their present situation is bad. Their present situation is not desirable. They're in a bad place. If they don't believe they're in a bad place, they're not going to listen to you when you say you need to move. Second, you need to convince them that where you want to take them is better than where they are now. What you're offering is desirable. And that makes sense to us, too. I mean, if what you're taking me isn't better than where I am, why would I put in the work to move?

But there's a third thing, and I think one of the most important aspects to achieving any kind of life change is you must believe that the change itself is possible. You need to believe that the change is possible. And these three things that you need to believe are no less true when it comes to our sanctification.

When it comes to pursuing holiness, when it comes to the Christian striving to be more like our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, these three things must be in place. And scripture will do that. It'll tell us your sin, the sin you're

engaging with right now, it's deadly. And where it want to take you, the look at the life of Christ, look at his apostles, look at the righteousness of Christ, isn't that better?

But I think where most of us struggle, especially in this room right now, because I know y'all and I know myself, at least to some extent, I think where we really struggle is number three, believing that the change is possible. Oftentimes, Satan tries to trick Christians into believing that you're still a slave to sin. That sinful habit, that mindset, that sin that clings so closely, Why bother? It's part of who you are, you just gotta have to live with it. The change that you want, that you desire, it's just not possible.

But what this text tells us this morning, is that Christ will sanctify you. Christ will sanctify you. That's what you need to know from this text this morning. And as we look at this, as we want to establish this from this text, we're going to do that under three major headings. The first one is Christ will sanctify you even in a sinful world. Christ will sanctify you even in a sinful world. Look with me at verse 11. Now, may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you. Now, what does he mean here by direct our way to you?

Well, if you remember earlier from the explanation section, why had Paul not been able to make it to the Thessalonians? Why, after he planted the church, had he never visited them again? Why did he have to send Timothy? Well, Paul tells us it's because Satan stopped up the path. Satan prevented him from getting to the Thessalonians. And the word he's using here, when he says, may God direct our way to you, is actually the positive version of the word used to talk about what Satan's doing. In other words, if Satan has stopped up the path, he's saying, may God, our father, clear the path to get to you. And notice what Paul is doing here. Paul, more than anything else, as we've seen from this text, desired to see the Thessalonians. He loved them dearly and he was very concerned for their welfare, was he not? We saw that last time.

But he acknowledges by lifting up this prayer to God that he can't change the situation. It's out of his hands. He sent Timothy, he's done what he can, but at the end of the day, all he can do is leave the situation in God's hands because he is not in control. You know, as much as technology tries to convince us, tries to make us believe that we're in control of our circumstances, we're not.

We really have very little control over our circumstances. We only have to go back to this last February with the great icepocalypse to remember that. How many of you felt powerless in that moment? Well, I definitely felt powerless. I was without power for two weeks, but that's beside the point. Yeah, we all felt very powerless. We had no control.

And that is true of all of our lives, even today. We have some control of our circumstances, but there's a vast majority of things in our life we have no control over. Any day now, we could get a diagnosis. Any day now, something could happen to your kid or grandkid. Any day now, your life experience could totally shift. And the reason things like that can happen is because we live in a sinful world. This world is difficult. This world is hard. There are circumstances that I know many of you have faced that are awful and terrible. Why do we have to acknowledge that? And not only do we live in a sinful world that just is broken and cursed, we have an enemy.

Why did Paul have to pray that God would clear the way to the Thessalonians? Because Satan had stopped it up. And Satan intended that stopping up of Paul's path to destroy the church in Thessalonica, to cut them off from the one who planted them, to cut them off from someone who could be of help to them. We have an enemy. And there are times in our lives where Satan will be permitted to stop up our paths, to harm our circumstances.

We live in a world with very real obstacles. We have to acknowledge that. But we don't just live in a world that's full of obstacles. We live in a world that is ruled by our Father. We live in a world that's ruled by our Father. Paul's reaction here, notice again, is not, oh, well, there's nothing I can do about it, et cetera, cetera, whatever will be will be. No, he goes to his heavenly father. Why? Well, he goes to his heavenly father because his heavenly father is the one who is ultimately sovereign.

Yes, this world is broken. Yes, this world is sinful. Yes, Satan is permitted some power to stop up our path. But the evil of the world and the evil of Satan do not overrule the providence of God. They cannot. God is always sovereign. God is always in control. That's why Paul lifts up this prayer to him. And notice how he names God. He doesn't just say that some God somewhere is sovereign who might have some good thoughts for me. You know, there's a God out there somewhere. He's working things out. I hope my good is in his plans, but you know, it might not be. No, he names him as his father.

This world isn't just ruled by God somewhere. This world is ruled by your father, by your heavenly father who loves you. And as we're gonna see in chapter four, you know what God's will for your life is? your sanctification. The will of God for your life is your sanctification. Therefore, if God is sovereign and he is our father, then your circumstances are not obstacles to your sanctification. They are the means of your sanctification.

Think about the Thessalonians. Satan intended the stopping up of Paul's path as a way to destroy the church at Thessalonica, but is that what happened? No. Paul receives a good report from Timothy, a report that says these Thessalonians, they've grown stronger. They're growing in their love for the Lord. They're growing in their love for the saints. What Satan intended for evil, God meant for good.

And that is true for your life. Your greatest obstacles, your greatest difficulties in your life, if you are tempted to believe that, oh, you know, I'd really pursue my sanctification, I'd really get after killing sin in my life and making Christ alive in my heart, if only this obstacle would go away, if only this were out of the way, if only I could remove this obstacle, then I could really focus on being sanctified. You've got it backwards. Your Heavenly Father has given you those obstacles for your sanctification, not against it. We have to believe the words of Romans 8, 28, even in difficulties, because if they don't mean something in difficult times, they don't mean anything at all.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. We live in a world not ruled by blind chance, not ruled by a God somewhere, but by our Heavenly Father. Yes, it's a world filled with obstacles, but it's a world ruled by our Father. Paul could echo the words of the last verse of, this is my Father's world. This is my father's world, though let me ne'er forget, that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet. This is my father's world. Why should my heart be sad? The Lord is king. Let heavens ring. God reigns. Let earth be glad. We live in a world ruled by our father, but not just ruled by our father. We live in a world ruled by our Savior. Look what else Paul says in verse 11.

It's not, if we have trouble believing that God the Father is interested in our sanctification, which we shouldn't, then we should definitely have no trouble believing that the Lord Jesus Christ is interested in our sanctification. Did he not purchase us with his own blood? Did he not die for us? And we look at our circumstances and we think, how can these circumstances be for our good? God doesn't understand that these circumstances are terrible. He doesn't understand the difficulties I'm dealing with.

Is not Jesus our great high priest, true man? A high priest who, in the words of Hebrews, can sympathize with our weaknesses, who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. We live in a world not just ruled by our Heavenly Father, but ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice that they're put together here. If you could read the Greek, which I wish people could read the Greek more, because there's some cool stuff that you just can't see in English, but it's all good, it's all good. The translations are great, it's just little things, little things. One of those little bitty things is how the verb here is singular. It's not they are directing our way to you, it is he directing our way to you.

There's unity here, a unity of power. The same authority the Father has is the authority the Son has. They are one in the Trinity. There are one in essence, three in person. They have the same power and authority, and they are directing that power and authority, even in our difficult circumstances, for our good.

Christ will sanctify you, beloved, even in a sinful world, because our God is on the throne. But not only will Christ sanctify you, even in a sinful world, he will sanctify you in your very heart. in your very heart. Look at verse 12. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you. May you abound in love. First thing we see here is the measure of love that Paul was talking about. The measure of love. May you increase and abound.

Notice that love is not something that the Thessalonians appeared to be lacking. Paul has said earlier on two occasions how Timothy brought back a positive report regarding the love of the Thessalonians. In chapter three, verse six, he says, but now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and reported how you always remember us kindly and so forth. The Thessalonians were not lacking in love.

The Holy Spirit had poured out that love in their hearts. But Paul isn't satisfied with that. Paul wants their love to continue. He wants their love to continue to increase and to abound, to overflow just as God's love overflows. Until our love looks like Christ's love, it's not complete.

And I want to encourage this congregation. This is one of the things that I have most noticed about this congregation is the outpouring of love. I can remember two years ago, I came here, I was a stranger. I didn't know any of you, I was a little intimidated when Dr. Waters told me, now make sure you wear a suit. Yeah, I was a little intimidated, I'm gonna be honest.

But the outpouring of love that I have received from this congregation has been so encouraging, so beautiful, and it's the love of Christ poured out into your hearts, and I see it. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in your hearts. Be encouraged by that, it's beautiful, it's wonderful. We can make it continue to abound, can't we? We can increase it. We can always love more. Why? Because we'll never reach the level of Christ's love for us. Not this side of glory. Probably not even then. The measure of love. We also see the object of love, the objects of love.

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. For one another and for all. The first thing he says is for one another. That's talking about the people in the church. You are to love one another. This is the commandment that Jesus gave his disciples in the upper room. He said, a new commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you. Paul says elsewhere in Galatians that you are to love all men, but especially those who are of the household of faith.

This leads us to something that we need to remember about love. There is a fittingness to love. We are not to love everyone in exactly the same way. Those of you who are married know this. You love your wife in a way you don't love anyone else. You might love the other children in this congregation, but there's a special way in which you love your children. And that's good. That's right. There is a rightness to that. There's a direction to love.

We are to love things in a properly ordered way. That's why we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Our love toward God is to be the greatest. Our love toward one another is to be second to that.

It's the second commandment, not the first one. And so that also applies in the church. There is a certain amount of love that we are to extend towards one another, a certain kind of love we're to express toward those who are of the household of faith that is different from the love that we extend toward those outside. Doesn't mean we don't love those outside, but it means we love our brothers and sisters in a way that we don't love those who are not our brothers and sisters. There is a special love there. Notice also that Paul is assuming there is a one another here. He's assuming that these believers are in a church.

You cannot fulfill the commandments of scripture on your own. If you are not in a church, you cannot obey the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because he says, you must love one another as I have loved you. You can't do that on your own. You need the church. Christ places you in the church that in showing your love towards one another, you show your love towards Christ, because as Paul learned on the Damascus Road when he heard Jesus cry, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Whatever you did to the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

Love one another, but also The love is to be extended, according to this text, to those outside the church. We are to love our communities. In this context, the love that Paul is calling for the Thessalonians as a body to show is toward those outside the church, particularly those in Thessalonica, the very people that are persecuting them, the very people who have ostracized them, the very people who have taken every opportunity to do them harm. That is the people the Thessalonians are called to love.

I wanna ask us in our congregation, do we extend love to the community of Yazoo City? The love, we pour out love towards one another and it's wonderful, it's great, it's amazing. And we do pour out our love to the community in some respect. But do we do that enough? Just asking the question, are there ways that we as a body can show love toward the community of Yazoo City?

We're commanded to. This is the word of the Lord. We can also do this individually in our lives, in our vocations, our jobs, family, friends. We're to show the love of Christ to everyone. Yes, in a special way to our brothers and sisters, but surely to everyone. So we've seen the measure of love. We've seen the objects of love. Third, we see the example of love. The example of love.

Look what he says. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you. If there's one thing we've learned through this explanation section, is that Paul and his companions dearly loved the folks at Thessalonica. Did he not?

He describes that love as like a nursing mother for the child in her arms. And we said earlier, that is a sacrificial love, the kind of love that puts your needs to the side, that never says, that's my time, that's my body, that's my possessions, that always says, I will give, I will sacrifice, I will lay down my life. It is that kind of love that Paul is calling for here. Paul is calling for a sacrificial love, and that sacrificial love can be hard. It can be difficult.

But really, it's just an expression of the kind of love that Christ has shown us. John says it well in one of his epistles. He says, this we believe, that Christ laid down his life for us, and thus we must lay down our lives for the brethren. Jesus said, greater love is none than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

That's the kind of love. That's the kind of love that Christ is to pour out into our hearts and is the kind of love that he has promised to pour out into our hearts. This isn't something we work up. This isn't something that we have to somehow delve and find and look for out there or somewhere out there.

It is the kind of love that has already been poured into your heart if you are a true believer in Jesus Christ. If you are not a believer, if you have never If you have never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you are not in union with Him, if you do not know Him as your Savior, you will never know Him as your sanctifier. It is Christ, it is His love that must be poured into your hearts and that will not happen until you have surrendered your life to Him. You will never be sanctified if you are not first justified. The path of sanctification for an unbeliever is the path to despair. But if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then this love is in your heart.

It has been poured and it's increasing. God has promised to increase it. He will increase it. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. Don't let Satan convince you, oh, you could never love like that. That kind of love, that's for the hyper spiritual people. That's not for you. It is for you.

Because you have the Holy Spirit and God has promised to sanctify you wholly, even down to your very heart. So Christ will sanctify you, even in a sinful world. He will sanctify you in your very heart. And he will sanctify you third and finally, as surely as he will come again. He will sanctify you as surely as he will come again.

Look at verse 13. so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. First thing we can see from this is that your holiness is assured. Your holiness is assured. If you are in Christ, then you have received Christ's imputed righteousness. You are as holy now in God's sight as you will ever be. You have His perfect righteousness. You're wrapped in His garment. You are not saved based on anything you have done or based on anything you will do. You are holy in that sense.

But if all of us are honest, if we look at our own hearts and lives, while we are holy positionally, our lives still have much unholiness in them. And it's a struggle. But the good news of this text is that God will not give up on you. And one day, when you are raised from the dead and you stand before the Lord Jesus, when he comes in judgment, you will stand truly holy with no evil desires, no sin that clings so closely.

All of it will be taken away. That holiness is assured. It is assured you will be made flawlessly holy again. He who began a good work at you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus, until his coming. It will surely happen. When we meet the church and the revelation as this bride without spot or wrinkle, clothed in white, coming beautiful to meet the Lord Jesus Christ, that bride is you. You will be spotless. You will be wrinkle-free. God will see to it. Even in this text, he will establish.

Notice, Paul takes this to the Lord in prayer. May God establish your hearts blameless. This is God's work. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, the sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. Yes, we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but only because God is at work within you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Your holiness is assured. Not only is your holiness assured, your holiness is eternal. It's eternal. He will establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, the struggle with sin is real. And as we've seen before, even last week, Matt did a wonderful job preaching to us about, sin is serious, sin is deadly. We need to take sin seriously in our lives, absolutely. But there is a sense, there is a real sense in which we can look at the sin in our lives, the sin that clings so closely, and say, and laugh, really. Because that's temporary. Those sinful desires in your heart, they're not what's most real in you.

They're gonna pass away. The holy desires, the part of you that loves God, the part of you that desires Christ, that desires his righteousness, that's what's going to live on. That's going to be forever. That's why Jesus says to his disciples, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, where thieves do not break in and steal. Your sanctification, any progress you make against sin, even right now, that progress is not temporary. That's eternal. It's an eternal weight of glory. Don't be discouraged. The gold will stay.

The dross will be burned up. Yes, it's a struggle. Yes, we should not take this as license to sin. Those of you who truly trust in Jesus will know we shall not continue in sin that grace may increase. May it never be. But we can take it as comfort. Comfort and assurance to spur us on. It can be done. Not perfectly in this life, but it will be done perfectly at the coming of our Lord Jesus.

This holiness, it's assured, it's eternal, and it's communal. It's communal. Look how he ends it. He says, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. It's a bit of a foreshadowing to what he's gonna talk about with consolation, where he talks about the dead in Christ rising first. But don't miss what he's doing with this here.

Friends, your struggle with sanctification is not yours alone. You're not on your own. You're not by yourself. This is a struggle that every single Christian throughout the hundreds of years of church history, throughout the 2,000 years of church history, to even back to the days of Adam and Eve, have struggled. The sins you are struggling with right now, the temptations you're struggling with, the doubts you're wrestling with, they are the same doubts, the same sins that our forefathers have fought against and have overcome. And even now, you are not struggling alone. You have a whole body of believers. And we're all struggling. I'm struggling. I'm fighting sin. I'm striving after my sanctification. So all of us are. You're not in this alone.

And one day you will be presented with all of the church, spotless, without wrinkle or any such thing. Friends, your you, Christ, will make you holy as surely as surely as He will come again. It's a promise. Christ will make you holy, brothers and sisters.

Even in our sinful world that seems to throw every obstacle in our path, those aren't actually obstacles. They're training. They're the loving work of our Heavenly Father to make us holy and the loving work of our Savior. And God promises to make us holy even down to our very core, even in our very heart. and he will make us holy as surely as he will come again. You will be righteous in his sight, not just positionally, but truly, even on the inside, even down to your core. I don't know about you, but I'm looking forward to that day when the church militant becomes the church at rest.

Let's pray. Our Father and our God, we thank you that you are the sanctifier. That you don't leave us to purify ourselves. You don't leave us to work to work out our own salvation on our own. But you surely work within us to will and to work to your good pleasure. And that you've promised to sanctify us. Lord.

Help us to believe this, to get it down into our hearts. Don't let Satan convince anyone in this room that this is not true for them, that they're a believer in Jesus Christ, they're saved, but the whole sanctification thing, they just can't do it. Remind them, Lord. And Lord, if there's anyone here that has not yet been justified, that has been seeking to sanctify themselves, Break them of this, Lord. Show them that they cannot do it without you. Break them, Lord. Bring them to the end of themselves. Show them their sin, but show them their Savior. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.