

1 Thessalonians 1: 2-4; "The Prayers of a Missionary",
Sermon # 3 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy were not only missionary men who planted churches. They were also men who watered them with their prayers. Paul terms them, "our prayers" in verse 2. Evidently prayer was something that they, as missionary men engaged in regularly as they labored and traveled together. Prayer, it says in the shorter catechism is the offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies." Missionaries are, or they should be, men of great desire in their prayers. Their desire is to see the gospel come with power to people who have never heard of Christ before; people who they know, if they never hear of Him, will perish without Him. But the missionary is not only a man who desires the salvation of the lost; he is a man who greatly desires the growth and maturity of those whom he has seen come to know the Lord. He is committed just as much to this as he is to their conversion. Here in these verses we see the continuing commitment of these missionary men to the church in Thessalonica by means of their prayers. They knew something about prayer which you and I need to know, and that is this. The prayers of God's people for one another are part of the means that God uses to sustain their faith so that they will persevere in doing all that Christ has commanded them to do. Those who are leaders in Christ's church must lead in prayer, in the way that the Apostle Paul describes here, so that their congregations will grow. It is very desirable that they might become spiritual warriors in their prayers; thinking often of, and interceding for, each member in the local church in order that they might grow in their faith and bear fruit unto God. They see that prayer must be offered up for the believers and members in their church and other churches so that God will be glorified in them and the gospel will be spreading to many. Those who teach and lead, do so by their example. So we want to look at the prayers of a missionary this afternoon; what they consist of. They consist of 3 things; of Thanksgiving first of all. Of making mention of people, 2ndly. And then 3rdly, remembering the spiritual work of other believers without ceasing. I hope that this study will cause all us to see our spiritual responsibility to pray and that we will lay hold of it.

1st of all - A Missionary's Prayers and our prayers ought to consist of Thanksgiving for all the people in our church and other churches. (Verse 2)

We give thanks to God always for you all..., Paul says in verse 2. Thanksgiving to God shows God how happy we are, how satisfied we are, how much we approve of His work in our lives and in the lives of others. Thanksgiving in our prayers is that which brings glory to Him. It is that which pleases Him. Psalm 69: 30 - "I will praise the name of the Lord with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving." "This shall please the Lord better than an ox or bull, which has horns and hooves." "The humble shall see this and be glad; and you who seek God, your hearts shall live." You see, in making mention of what we are thankful for, in terms of what the Lord is to us, or has done for us, we are magnifying His name. We think of Him highly, we honor and esteem Him above all beings as the Most High and the Most Excellent. His name we praise, His wisdom and power we trust, and we are thankful that He is so great and glorious and compassionate to sinners. The thankfulness of our hearts and the thanks which we give Him in words are worth more to the Lord than any sacrifice that we can offer which we might think might please Him; any ceremonial sacrifice, or anything we might try to bring and do sacrificially to pay him back. "The Lord longs to be gracious to you," it says in Isaiah 30: 18, in the NAS, "and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you." The greatest compassion and mercy that the Lord gives to us in this life is not in giving us material gifts and blessings, although he is great in bestowing those things. The greatest of His gifts of blessing pertain to the grace and the gift of salvation which He gives to those who will trust in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And the overflow of that best of blessings is that He has given us who know Him to each other in the local church of which we are a part. The question is, do you thank Him for those people? "We give thanks to God always for you all," says Paul. Are you always thankful to God that he has made you a part of this local church and that He has given you the brothers and sisters in Christ that you do have? Do you tell God so, in your prayers?

You say to me, "Well, as I think about them, the word "thankful" is not so much what comes to my mind." "They are not exactly the people that I would have chosen to be placed with, you know." "They do really have things about them that I really cannot figure out and which I cannot say I identify with." Well brother, I do not want to offend you, but God is the One who has chosen them, and He is the One who has chosen you; and so you see that He is the One who has deliberately placed you together. He

expects you to be thankful because He knows that you can learn and grow being around and with such people provided that they are humble and you are humble. God knows that they are in some ways, marvelously different from you. God's wonderful plan is not that everyone would be exactly like you in the local church. You should learn to give Him thanks always for all of His people, and He will prove to you why you should be so, in time to come.

2ndly - A Missionary's prayers and our prayers should include making mention of people by name. (Verse 2b)

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers." Now this is an important component of seeing your prayers answered specifically. It is not just that you pray for your church and your brothers and sisters in general. It is that you mention people by name in your prayers. I believe that this is what the verse is saying. It is very needful that when you pray that you move on from making the more general statements about the church, to being more specific in praying for individual people in your church. It is good and right, in other words, to mention families by name, and singles by name and children by name in your prayers. You can see an example of Paul's consideration of individuals in a local church if you will turn with me to Romans 16. In verses 3-16 he gives his greetings to the brethren there, and he makes mention of no less than 23 individual people who he names, along with several households of people that he mentions as well. There is first, Priscilla and Aquilla, who he calls, "his fellow workers who risked their own necks for his life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." You think that Paul doesn't pray for them always giving thanks? No, I am very sure he does. In verse 5 he calls Epaenetus "the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. What a distinction. But it shows Paul's consideration of God's work in this person. Don't you think that as he ponders what God has done for this man and through him, that would be praying for him as well? I think that he does. Then he mentions in verse 6, Mary, who labored much for us." Paul valued these labors of hers highly. He was thankful for her, he remembered the good things that she was doing to help their missionary work in very practical ways. And I am sure that he prayed for her all the more because of the value that he placed upon her labors. Then he mentions Andronicus and Junia, his countrymen and his fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me, he says. The list goes on and on. Paul thinks about his shared experiences with those whom he has mentioned, and I am sure that this led him on to prayer as he remembered what they shared. He knew the value of these men who were apostles and

he also knew the value of those who were "nobodies" in the sight of the world, those who had been involved in laboring together in the gospel when he and Silvanus and Timothy came to them.

I believe that these greetings are an indication of what his prayer life was like. Prayer that makes mention of the individual names of people, requires that those people be specifically thought upon before the prayer is made. These people that Paul mentions are upon his heart and in his mind often. You could say that they are upon his heart continually. Each person, it is evident, is of real significance to him. They are not just a certain number that he thinks of collectively, they are members of the body. They are important to him because he has come to know, and to see, and to believe that they are all of significance in making up Christ's body, the local church in that place of Rome. This is a Christ-like quality, because our Lord Jesus does the same for each of us who believe. He carries us on His holy heart. He ponders us in His holy mind. And He intercedes before the Father with our names being mentioned in his the words of His heart and His lips. Paul was only becoming more like his blessed Savior. What about you? Will you not begin to pray in this way that mentions the specific names of God's people, bringing them before the Father? Oh how your prayer life will grow as you begin to think of the people in this church and the details of what you remember of their words and their work comes to you mind. The Holy Spirit will help you and guide you in thinking of what you should pray about in relation to each one. There is nothing wrong with your drawing up prayer lists of the people who are in our church here, and lists also of their relatives who need salvation or the Lord's help. This is certainly pleasing to God and profitable to Christ kingdom and His people.

Now 3rdly- A Missionary's prayers and our prayers should include remembering the spiritual work of other believers without ceasing. (Verse 3)

Verse 3 says, ..."remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father." There was in the prayers of these missionary men, "a remembering without ceasing." This remembering in the presence of God is a form of praying itself. "Pray without ceasing" it says in 1 Thessalonians 5: 17. I suppose it could be worded here, "remembering in prayer without ceasing..." And even the very specifics of what Paul and the others remembered unceasingly is given to us. "We remember without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father." What a tremendous picture here is given to us into the spiritual activity of the heart of a true Christian.

These believers had faith, but they knew that they had to work at it to keep it strong by the grace which Christ supplied. Faith is something which needs to be in exercise in the Christian's heart or it may grow weak and languish. We do have to work at faith. If you turn over to 1 Timothy Chapter 6 with me, you will see this is true. Verse 11 says, "But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." Timothy is told to flee the love of money and pursue after these spiritual realities which will bring God's rich blessings to him in his soul and spirit, and one of them is faith itself. Faith must be pursued. You must run after faith or you will run after more money instead, and it will become a snare to you. Verse 12 which follows, says, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." To fight the fight requires great exertion of the soul to wrestle through many issues in life related to sin and righteousness in living our life. It will not do to procrastinate and lie down on the job as a Christian. To maintain takes hard work. To fight the good fight of faith requires stamina and strategy. We must ask ourselves the question in every situation; "Am I exercising faith, or am I exercising doubt and fear and skepticism?" Whatever is not of faith is sin. It will not glorify God in any way if we are lazy or neglectful of our faith. But by faith in Christ I can do all things. But how good it is when I come to realize that someone else in this church is praying for my work of faith to continue.

The labor of love is something remembered in prayer by Paul and the other missionary men. Again, love too, is something that is a labor, something we work at, something that we do not assume that we or others in the church are doing at all times. We might be asked, "Do you love so-and-so who goes to this church?" And we answer, "Yes, I love them very much." But the question follows, "How do you love them?" "What are you doing to show them the love of Christ?" And finally, the patience of hope or steadfastness of hope is something that the missionary men remembered in prayer. They were thankful that they saw this grace in the believers at Thessalonica. But they remembered without ceasing in prayer this hope of theirs in the grace of Christ, appealing to God that He would, indeed, really sustain these young believers through all of their trials. They might be tempted to leave off following Christ because of persecution. But the missionary men knew and remembered the faithfulness of God was the basis of a Christian's hope. The strength of their faith, love, and hope was continually being monitored "in the sight of their God and Father. Are you not thankful that our Lord is so trustworthy in giving us grace to persevere

in our faith, our love, and our hope? Our faith will not fail ultimately because of the prayer and intercession of Christ. But how much the prayers of faithful men helped to forward the cause of Christ and sustain the work of faith, love, and hope; only eternity will tell. May each of us be among that number.