

A THANKSGIVING EXHORTATION and PRAYER

Sermon by Mark S. Aites

TEXT: 2 THESS. 2:13-17

INTRODUCTION:

1. In a few days we will mark one of the great traditions in this country; a holiday which we recognize as, "Thanksgiving."
2. It generally is a time for family gatherings and over-eating.
3. We are tremendously blessed in this country and live far above most of those who live in this world.
 - 1) Generally speaking, we have abundant food, shelter, and clothing.
 - 2) Even as a church, we are blessed meeting in such comfortable surroundings; warmth, and cushioned seating.
4. We have so much to be thankful for, and we certainly do not need to wait for a holiday to express thanks (**1 Thess.5:18**).
6. In view of our tremendous blessings, each year, either in bulletin or sermon, I like to read from President Lincoln's proclamation.*****
7. Lincoln reminds us of what James wrote (**James 1:17**).
8. As we consider our blessings and reasons to give thanks, I want to offer a thanksgiving message in which I give thanks for you, offer an exhortation, and offer a prayer for you.
9. **Read text: 2 Thess. 2:13-17**

BACKGROUND:

1. Paul is writing to a congregation which he established on his 2nd missionary journey (**Acts 17:1-9**).
2. Why did Paul preach in Thessalonica? Many believe because of its location, and the fact that there was a Jewish synagogue there. Paul could not pass up such an opportunity to spread the gospel.
3. Scripture speaks of how he initially reasoned out of the scriptures in the synagogue (**Acts 17:2-4**).
4. But if you recall from the story the brethren had to send Paul away because of the uproar caused by the Jews.
5. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian brethren was written from Corinth, not long thereafter, on his second missionary journey.
 - 1) In that epistle he expressed his pleasure at the steadfastness of the church.
 - 2) And Paul addressed matters pertaining to the second coming of Christ.
7. In the second letter, generally believed to have been written in Corinth a few months later, Paul tried to correct misunderstandings which the brethren had regarding the second coming and events to come.
8. It is here in the second chapter that Paul opens with a warning regarding the impending apostasy that would precede the Lord's return.
 - 1) His concern is with the man of sin, or the lawless one that would be revealed.
 - 2) The same who would deceive the people with lying wonders.
9. With error on the horizon, Paul has a note of thanksgiving, exhortation, and prayer which I have selected for our thanksgiving lesson.

DISCUSSION:

I. THANKSGIVING.

- A. **2 Thess. 2:13-14**
- B. Paul opens with a conjunction which shows a direct correlation to what he has just discussed.
 - 1. The Greek shows the connection and draws a contrast between the ones who would be deceived and the Thessalonians.
 - 2. According to **vs 12**, the ones who would be deceived in the apostasy were ones: *“who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*
 - 3. But the Thessalonians, by implication, were not like those who had pleasure in unrighteousness.
- C. In contrast, *“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you.”*
 - 1. One of the characteristics of Paul was that he was open in expression of his gratitude.
 - 2. Some people may feel gratitude, but may not convey it well.
 - 3. Numerous times in the writings of Paul, do we find encouragement to express thanks (**Rom. 16:4; Eph. 1:15-16**).
- D. In observing a lesson by Foy Forehand, he wrote:
 - 1. “Being thankful is not only commanded, it is smart.”
 - 2. “You will catch a lot more bees with sugar and honey than you will with vinegar.”
- E. As Paul conveys his thanksgiving for these brethren, he regards them as, *“brethren beloved by the Lord.”*
 - 1. The Greek lit. means, *“having been loved by the Lord.”*
 - 2. Because of it being what is called a perfect participle, it conveys the idea that they have been and still are an object of the Lord’s love.
 - 3. What a strong contrast between those who rejected the truth for a lie, and those whom are the objects of thanksgiving and love.
- F. Paul then gives the reason as to why they are the object of the Lord’s affection.
 - 1. *“Because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”*
 - 2. It has always been God’s intention for Jews and Gentiles to be saved in Christ (**Eph. 1:4**).
 - 3. Even before the creation of the world, God chose those who would be saved, the Calvinist teaches.
 - 1) The Calvinist would teach that certain ones were predestined to be lost and others saved, and that man has no choice in the matter.
 - 2) The error comes in not understanding how God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.
- G. Note how Paul says we are chosen for salvation; which is actually two-fold (**2 Thess. 2:13**).
 - 1. When Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane: *“Sanctify them in thy truth, Thy word is truth.”* (**John 17:17; cf. 8:32**).
 - 3. The word is the agent by which the Spirit sanctifies or sets us apart from the

- world.
4. It is belief in that truth, which encompasses the idea of obedience to it, which affords us salvation.
- H. Being two-fold in statement, note also **vs 14**.
1. Notice in the same context, Paul speaks of God and man both having a part in man's salvation.
 2. It has been suggested that man has nothing whatsoever to do with his salvation, that it is only a matter of faith.
 3. But in contrast to that thought, Paul says we are called by the gospel and our response to the preaching of the gospel is obedience to it.
 - 1) It is able to save the soul if one will respond to it in obedience (**Rom. 1:16-17; James 1:21**).
 - 2) But even Paul wrote that not all have obeyed the gospel (**Rom. 10:16**).
- H. If you summarize Paul's actual note of thanksgiving, he is grateful for their positive response to the gospel, for the fact that they believed and obeyed the truth.
- I. As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, I say, not only now, but always, that I give thanks for you.
1. For your obedience to the truth, and your willingness to defend the same.
 2. For your firm resolve to hold to the Bible as the only safe guide to heaven.
 3. For the growing loving spirit that with each day is manifesting itself.
 4. For your excitement for the future of this congregation.
 5. And personally, for your encouragement, in my efforts to preach the gospel.
 6. Only a fool we be ungrateful for such wonderful blessings as these.

II. EXHORTATION.

- A. **2 Thess. 2:15**
- B. Any time you see the words *therefore* or *wherefore*, our writer is making a conclusion.
1. Based on the previous thoughts, Paul wants the Thessalonian brethren to stand fast.
 2. This is the same encouragement which he gave the brethren at Corinth (**1 Cor. 15:58; 16:13**).
 3. To the Galatian brethren, Paul warned them lest they become "*tangled again in a yoke of bondage*" (**Gal. 5:1**).
 5. To the Philippian brethren (**Phil. 4:1**).
- C. Paul also encouraged them to "*Hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.*"
1. These traditions were not things which were received from man, as we normally may think of traditions.
 2. These traditions were the things which these brethren had either received by epistle, or by teaching which were handed down from God.
 3. The word *tradition* lit. means "*to give over.*"

4. It can refer to the things of man or the things of God (**Matt. 15:9; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8**).
 5. There are therefore traditions which are handed down by Christ, which the brethren must hold to.
- D. The church was certainly beset by problems in the first century.
1. There was the constant barrage of Judaism in their efforts to turn brethren to an observance of the Law of Moses.
 2. There were the Gnostics; those who denied that the Christ came in the flesh which was particularly evident with the church at Colossae.
 3. There were those denying the resurrection of Christ (**1 Cor. 15**).
 4. There were those making shipwreck of the faith (**1 Tim. 1:19**).
 5. And certainly the seeds for the great apostasy were already being sown.
 6. Although we often think of the church as loving, growing, and dynamic, we may tend to forget the many problems which existed.
- E. In application, the caution must remain in affect.
1. The church is still beset by problems, as we face attacks both from without and within.
 2. The devil is wreaking havoc, in getting his servants to mock us and seek to cast doubt upon the very existence of God.
 3. There are constant pressures being exerted to get us to make concessions:
 - 1) To make the church more palatable to the world, to cause us to conform.
 - 2) Also, to change our worship to make it more entertaining, in an entertainment oriented society.
 - 3) To change even the very role of women within the church; appointing women elders, deacons, and preachers.
 - 4) And to accept alternate lifestyles, ignoring plain biblical passages which teach against the same (**Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 6:9-10**).
 4. Also are the attacks from within to accept the concessions which the world seeks of the church.
 5. My friends, these are difficult times.
- F. Brethren, because I appreciate you such much, and out of a deep love and respect, I would exhort you not to buckle under the pressure to conform (**Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:17**).
1. I would remind you that it is not unloving to uphold the truth.
 2. And there is a truth, one which men must obey in order to be saved.
- G. In view of the efforts to change in order to be more compatible with the world, I exhort you to "stand fast."
1. As we often sing, I encourage you to "Stand Up For Jesus!"
 2. We must not allow the church to be nothing more than just another religious body among many.
- H. Hold fast the traditions which you have been taught.
1. Many of you have been in the church for years and years.
 2. You have been privileged to hear many preachers of the gospel; sat through many classes, and perhaps even yourself have taught others.

3. Don't abandon what you have been taught when others cry that it is outdated.
4. Don't abandon the truth to be more pleasing to the world (**1 John 2:15**).
5. "Hold to God's unchanging hand."

III. PRAYER.

- A. **2 Thess. 2:16-17**
- B. Paul opens with what may be termed His prayer for the brethren at Thessalonica by use of an intensive pronoun: "*The Lord Himself.*"
 1. It is a very strong term in the Greek which conveys that Paul is praying that the Lord will be fully behind these good brethren.
 2. Of interest, equally forceful is the parallel of "*our God and Father.*"
- C. In a very beautiful way Paul reminds them of the love of Christ, and the sacrifice which the Lord made on their behalf.
 1. The words *love* and *gave* are aorist participles in the Greek, which is of great significance.
 2. It means that once, and only once, did the Lord love and give, a definite reference to His sacrifice on the cross.
 3. We know certainly that the Lord continues to love us, and give or provide for us; but this refers to a matter that occurred but once.
 4. **Heb. 9:12; Rom. 5:8.**
 6. Indeed in that sacrifice God has given us hope and consolation by grace.
- D. But the Bible does teach this same concept, that is a matter that occurs but once, in our response to God.
 1. When Paul's life on earth was coming to a close (**2 Tim. 4:6-8**).
 2. The phrase at the end of Paul's statement, that *love*, or lit. *that have loved his appearing* is the same basic kind of speech.
 3. Once again, it points to a one time action.
 4. Consider what this signifies:
 - 1) In our text, **2 Thess. 2:16** the Lord loved and gave of Himself once meaning that He gave His life in sacrifice for us.
 - 2) In Paul's thoughts in **2 Tim. 4:8**, he speaks of those who loved the Lord's appearing; once:
 1. These are the same ones who were born anew (**John 3:3-5**).
 2. The same who went through the washing of regeneration (**Titus. 3:5**).
 3. Those who had been baptized into Christ, who put Him on in baptism (**Gal. 3:27**).
- E. Paul closes our text with the prayer that the Lord would *comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work*.
 1. Without getting into all the construction of the original phrase, I will say that the mood of what is written is highly significant.
 2. This particular concept in the Greek, that is used in this passage, occurs only 67 times in the entire New Testament
 3. By using this form of speech, it demonstrates the absolute confidence of the

- one using it.
4. But it also means that the writer is certain that it is conceivable.
 5. In other words, Paul is absolutely confident that if the Lord wills, He will comfort and establish them.
 6. It is interesting that Paul expresses it this way.
 7. Note **1 John 5:14**.
 8. But even the apostle Paul knew, that if it was God's will it, would happen; if not, it would not.
 9. But also, because of the nature of Paul's request, it is likely that this prayer was indeed answered.
 10. You may wonder why I would state that? Because from everything one reads in God's Holy Word, this request is in harmony with the will of God.
- F. In expressing thanksgiving for you, and exhorting you, I also would offer a prayer for you; that the Lord also would comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.

CONCLUSION:

1. As you ponder your thoughts of thanksgiving, I would encourage you to take this passage:
 - 1) Give thanks for your brethren.
 - 2) Exhort them to always remain steadfast.
 - 3) Pray for them.
2. It is one of the most beautiful thanksgiving thoughts found in the Word of God.
3. In the strongest possible way, I would exhort those present who have never yet obeyed the gospel of Christ.
 - 1) If you truly are in a frame of thanksgiving, how can you not respond to One who has given so much for you.
 - 2) Just think of the cross; the suffering, agony, and death of Christ, all done for you.
4. If you are truly grateful, open your heart and life to the Lord of all things.