

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, you gave your one and only Son to be the light of the world. Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and believed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. He said to me, "You are my servant in whom I will display my splendor." Alleluia. (Isaiah 49:3 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

"What's the point?" The words are often spoken in frustration as one begins to question the purpose of something. Thessalonica was not an easy place to be a Christian and one can easily imagine that the frustration of the constant rejection, even persecution, would take its effect on these Christians.

Does any of that sound familiar? I recently read another article lamenting the speed at which our world seems to be descending into immorality and it's easy isn't it? It's easy as arguments are dismissed, and the Word sneered and laughed at in colleges and other places to begin to wonder, "What's the point? Why should I even try?"

Today, Paul offers encouragement as he reminds us that **THE GOSPEL CALLS US!** It calls us **TO SHARE IN THE GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST IT PROCLAIMS** and **TO STAND FIRM IN THE TEACHINGS IT HANDS TO EACH OF US.**

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is certainly thankful that these Thessalonians are believers. As I just mentioned, Thessalonica is not an easy place to be a Christian. When Paul came to town in Acts chapter 17, he was met by real resistance. The Jews sought to toss him into jail and when they couldn't find him tried to toss Jason, in whose house Paul had stayed in instead. Only after posting bail did they let him go home. Those same Jews then pursued Paul to Berea where they drove him out of town. I can't imagine that things had become easier since Paul had left for this new church he had left behind.

So why? Why were they still doing it? Paul tells us even as he encourages them. The Gospel had called them to share in the glory of Jesus. Of course the Thessalonians might say, "Some glory huh? Persecution, frustration, imprisonment and death, yep sounds pretty glorious." This has always been the struggle for God's people. Philip and Nathaniel along with the twelve

Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

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¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. – NIV84

will regularly get caught up in worldly glory, forgetting the true glory which Jesus brings (Acts 1). Even Samuel will get caught up in worldly standards of success as God calls him to anoint the second king of Israel, David (1 Samuel 16). Finally, Jesus himself sets the record straight as He talks with Pilate and His Kingship (John 18). Jesus never came for earthly power, kingdoms and prestige even though it is His and one day every knee will bow (Philippians 2:11).

Instead He came that we might be saved. Luke records the words of Jesus as He tells us , *“the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10).”* So Paul tells us that we are loved by the Lord, chosen from the beginning to be saved as the Spirit does His work through the Gospel.

Yes, it is this Gospel, God’s Word, which tells us of a Savior, Jesus Christ, who would forgo the glory due Him and face the frustration of sin, the persecution of a fallen world, and the rejection of the very people He had come to save. Yet as He endured it all perfectly for us, as He faced the cross in our place, He saved us. It is this work, this message which allows us to be children of God as the Holy Spirit does his work as we heard last week. Yes God calls us His own because he wants us to share in His glory. He wants us to be with Him forever in heaven.

Of course, there in is the encouragement as well. So Paul says, *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.* In other words, because this Word has been proclaimed to you, because you know that through it God wants you to be preserved in faith that you might stand with Him forever. Well then, live in this Word.

But then this is not easy is it? This is the very thing the Thessalonians and which you and I living in a sinful world struggle with so much. Well, remember, first our work never earns or deserves anything from our God, Jesus’ does. So when I struggle with holding firm, this is the result of loosing focus. In every case in my life, it happens when I turn my attention from the Savior and back to me. When I’m not listened to, or I don’t think the results are coming as quickly or completely as I think they should be that’s when “what’s the point” and “why even try” begin to come forward again. The answer to both of those questions is above, “Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost.” That’s you and me and it’s others. He wants all to share in His glory.

Then because this is true, then as faith focuses on Christ, well Jesus will send His spirit to work what He requires. In other words, as we focus on the cross, God provides the strength to stand firm and hold to its teachings. Again, there is a reason pastors pester people about church attendance and the regular reading of Scripture. God promises to work through His means of grace. So Paul pens that beautiful blessing at the end of our lesson.

I guess I can’t think of any better way to say amen either. So, as Paul reminds us of the power of the Gospel which calls us to share in Jesus’ glory and stand firm in the teachings of the Word, *“⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”* Amen!