

LSB 1 Thess. 3:9 - 13

9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you, 13 so that He may strengthen your hearts blameless in holiness, before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

This morning we come to a very very intimate moment between Paul, his people, his beloved brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, his children in Christ at Thessalonica who he deeply loves, and that also includes us who were not yet born, we're in here too, along with all of the saints, and a second and third party in this prayer, God the Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

He launches here from a two way conversation he was having with them into a prayer that is a three way conversation. He just brings God into the conversation as if God were there all the time, He is of course, and Paul simply turns and speaks to God instead of his people, as they listen in.

As we unpack these verses verse by verse we're going to learn something about God, theologically, we're going to learn something about Paul and Paul's driving world view, Paul's heart for his people, his motivations at the very inner core of his being, and thus his method of ministry.

And because Paul almost singlehandedly turned the world upside down, knowing his heart and his driving worldviews and his philosophy of ministry becomes a model that every christian in any kind of leadership who is trying to help other christians in their walks and growth should follow and emulate.

Paul is the model we should try to mimic. That was a word he used earlier as he said these brothers were imitators of the churches in Judea, also persecuted. As christians we imitate. We mimic. Like little children who grow up learning to imitate how their parents live and act whether good or bad, so we as christians are imitating someone.

In chapter one Paul says you became imitators of us, and of the Lord. They imitated Paul who had imitated Jesus. And that's a good model. So as Paul unbears his ministers heart to the Lord, we can become imitators of both his prayer and what he prayed for.

Like it or not, the truth is, every group of christians that becomes a corporate fellowship takes on some of the personality and character of their leadership. When you folks asked me to be your pastor, for better or for worse, you changed slightly the whole personality of us as an entity.

That's why James says *Be not many teachers*. *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.* Jas. 3:1.

The role of teacher is a leadership in which whether you realise it or not, you mimic your teacher. That's why the teacher is under a stricter judgement. Because he's a parent that children will mimic to a point. A shepherd who takes his sheep to safe places of plenty, or often a poor shepherd who leaves the sheep defenseless, hungry and thirsty.

You folks unknowingly got a little more egg headed when you asked me to preach. My priority is depth in the scriptures. This church began as a rather romantic notion of an old fashioned country church. It was based more in Pollyanna Whitaker than the scriptures. Sort of old fashioned country ranch values and friendliness.

That's actually not a bad model, but when you asked me to pastor, I wanted to bring scriptural depth to that model. Most of it is scripturally based. Some isn't. Like it or not, this isn't the same church Dennis and Maxine

envisioned. And I can name the folks who have left directly because of that. Mimicing leadership is a biblical pattern. It's what we do. And in this passage we get a look at the heart of the very best model to mimic that there ever was. Paul.

I've included verse 9 which we covered last time we met, just so we don't pick up the discussion mid sentence. It gives the conversational context and the shift from conversing with the brothers to conversing directly with God about the welfare of those brothers. Us included. So let's dive in.

9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

We said verse 9 is a comparative. A scale. Like an old balance beam type scale with a center fulcrum and two plates on either side that weigh against each other.

And Paul says, I can't pile enough thanks to God on one side of that scale to begin to offset the joy that God has given back to us, because of you.

And this is the first glimpse into what motivates Paul as a minister of the gospel. What makes Paul tick? What drives Paul to keep on doing what he's doing. What's the underlying motive that moves him forward day after day?

Joy. Happiness. My favorite quote from Blaise Pascal. It explains so much. Pascal was a christian, a mathematician, a scientist, a thinker. He said;

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is

the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”

Paul is motivated by what makes him happy. Just like you. Just like me. Paul suffers every indignity, trudging through persecution after persecution, beating after beating, in prison, out of prison, with a single motivation. Happiness. Joy.

And for Paul, and then by default, for any good leader, the cause of joy is the thriving, with God, of the people that he loves. The beatings, the imprisonments, the toil and travel and sickness and whatever else happens in that path to the wellbeing of those he loves, it pales in comparison.

What makes Paul go is the happiness, the sheer joy that he receives when his spiritual children are thriving. That's what he works for. That's his motivation. To be happy. Just like you. Just like me.

Our downfall is that unlike Paul, we don't all have the same prize that we are convinced will bring us happiness. Paul's motive is outside himself. My children thrive, joy floods in. Sadly, that pure motivation towards the thriving of others is very rare. Exceedingly rare. Paul got it right. The rest of us should mimic him.

10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

Joy has come from Timothy's report. But how much more fulfilling the joy if Paul could be with them, and see their faces, and know deeply what each lack in their faith might be so that he can supply what is lacking.

Paul's just greedy. Selfish Paul. Motivated by happiness. Driven by his own happiness. He's happy with the good report. But he wants even more happiness. He wants to be re-united with them so he can be even happier.

You see, if your source of happiness is outside yourself and derives from

the thriving of others, it's OK to be as selfish as possible to bring it about.

I can't help but talk about one of my hero's here, someone good to mimic, and that's Dr. John Piper. John Piper says it's OK for christians to be hedonists. There's such a thing as christian hedonism.

At first that sounds kind of shocking, and our minds instantly go to dark places, but at it's root, hedonism is merely the understanding of Pascal's quote about happiness as root motive, and simply diving into what it is that brings you happiness. That's a definition of hedonism.

And Paul was a hedonist. Paul understood the root of his joy was the thriving of his spiritual children, and Paul took on a hedonistic attitude toward the direction of his joy. Hedonism is OK if the object of your joy is the for the good of God's children and the resulting glory of God.

If that's your source of joy, be a hedonist, by all means. And so Paul says, it's great that I've got a report back from Timothy and my joy is overflowing knowing that you all are thriving and well and bringing glory to God, but the hedonism in me wants more.

I want to be with you. I want to fill up whatever faith is still lacking in you. I want to be with you to cause even more growth and thriving. More joy for me. Hedonist. Paul says I want to; *complete what is lacking in your faith*

We need to stop for a moment and consider what Paul says here. Faith. Paul wants to build up whatever may be lacking in their faith. That's important.

Romans 10:9 says *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*

Faith is the scariest thing in the world to secularism. Right? The idea that someone can read words in an ancient script, assign the authorship of those

words, to a God who is authoritative over all things, and modify behaviour based on that idea is terrifying to secular humanists.

The very idea that there is a God who created all things, and who then pierces thru the darkness with revelation, words, that are true and right and have authority over men. That means there is a source of truth. A baseline if you will. A source of absolute truths. An authority that all other words need to compare to.

We can say something is absolutely true or false, right or wrong, based on unalterable authoritative truths from God. Shocking. Fearful if you're a secularist. Frightening that people are motivated by some words that claim ultimate authority of truth and right.

Paul says I need to be with you so I can know what is lacking in your faith. They had a sound faith. They were solid. But Paul says if I was there we could go even deeper into the book and teach you truths that can alter your beliefs and motives even more. Faith results in works.

My own model of ministry is based on this. We teach this book verse by verse for one reason. Faith. Increased faith. As you understand the depths of this book, your faith grows and deepens. We need to bleed Bible from our innermost depths. We need to know and understand the truths of this book.

That becomes then our worldview. We get broadsided by something and our minds can instantly go to where the book addresses whatever it is. We see or hear something being broadcast at us and our minds can say either yay or nay and know where in scripture the truths that form those basis are at. Our faith is based in absolute revealed truth. God's word.

That word faith get's thrown around a lot these days. Earlier this week I was curious about a fellow named Graham Wardle. A key guy on the Heartland series Pam and I have been watching. He suddenly left the show. They killed him off. So I was curious about it and looked it up on google.

It said he left in order to concentrate on a faith based podcast he was doing. So I got more curious. Faith based. So I went and found his podcast. Turns out faith means faith in your own inner light. He's a new age guru who thinks the world is going into a winter and his podcast is about how to survive the coming winter. With your own inner godness, you can do it. Get ready.

I think he may be right. The world is going into a bleak winter. God's going to come and remove the church, the singular salt and light this world has, and the world is absolutely going into a bleak winter. But your inner light is not the way out, the way out is to belong to the person who wins. Transfer your ownership of yourself to Jesus who is in ultimate control and can see you safely through the fires. Just like Noah floating in the arc. Jesus rescues His own. Put your faith in someone who has the power to save. That's real faith.

Paul says I need to get to you, to be with you, face to face, so I can learn where your weaknesses are and build up your lack of faith in those specific areas. Corporately and individually. And then he launches into the prayer that can make it happen.

11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you,

Paul takes the direct approach. I want to be happy. I want to come and help my children thrive which is what makes me happy. And the way to perhaps make that happen is to come to the throne of the Sovereign One and ask specifically for that to happen.

Notice how Paul uses even his prayer to teach his children about God. Our first inclination about God is that He is all powerful, removed, out there running the universe, and that Jesus is perhaps more accessible to us, having come as a man and all.

Paul reverses that order in his prayer. *Now may our **God** and **Father** Himself and **Jesus** our **Lord*** God is the tender Father to us. Jesus is the sovereign Lord over us. And if we take a dive into the greek, there is even more here for us that was obvious to the original hearers that doesn't quite come through to us in our translation. Fascinating.

Listen to the original order of the words in the greek that Paul wrote;

Himself, now, the God and Father of us, and the Lord of us, Jesus, may direct the way of us to you.

Himself is the person to whom we are praying. The word Himself is personal / possessive pronoun; nominative masculine 3rd person *singular*. In the greek, Himself is a single person in word tense. But this is exciting. That single person is then identified as both God the Father, and the Lord, Jesus.

The single subject of the prayer, Himself, is identified as two separate persons. How is that possible? Either Paul's lost it, or . . . Jesus the Lord, and God the Father, are one person, yet two persons in the trinitarian Godhead.

Paul does it again in vs. 13. Same thing. We'll jump ahead just for a second. *so that **He** may strengthen your hearts blameless in holiness, before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints*

In vs. 13 we have He, singular, we have God the Father, and we have our Lord Jesus, again we're going to appear before both of them together as a single person at the coming of Jesus. But in vs. 13 the **He** in that text is the antecedent of **Himself** in vs. 11.

See, your faith is being built up even this morning. Next time the Jehovah's Witnesses come to your door you can take them to this verse and open up your greek dictionary and say, "How can the subject of this prayer,

Himself, be identified as two individual entities who are One? Jesus the Lord is Himself, and God the Father is Himself, and Himself is 3rd person singular. A singular who is a plurality."

God is mind boggling, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Our God is beyond our minds to comprehend. That's a God I can believe in. He made my brain too small to comprehend Him. I'm fine with that!

12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you,

If we were going to outline the components of this prayer, we would find it pretty simple. Paul is like a broken record. Faith, Hope, Love. Same thing over and over. The entire christian experience revolves around just 3 simple things. Faith, Hope, Love.

Paul began with Faith in vs. 10. A faith in absolute revealed truths that causes actions. We looked at that. Paul says I want to be face to face with you so I can open the scriptures with you and your faith can be built up stronger and stronger where it may be lacking.

And the Word of God living in you with faith in His precepts and truths has an effect upon christians. It causes love to spill out. MacArthur likes to say; "Hard preaching makes soft people. Hard preaching makes soft people."

The word of God living inside you increases faith which comes out in actions bathed in love.

And in vs. 12 Paul shifts from faith to Love. *and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love*, and of course the word here is agape, which is the selfless love that God has given to us who were unworthy, and God pours out that same love into christian hearts so that when we come together, we all love each other selflessly, expecting nothing in return.

We witness that in this church. You guys are just the huggiest most loving people anywhere. God does that. He pours out His love in us and it just spills over all over the place.

And that's foreign in this world. People should walk into a gathering of God's people and witness a real love that is other-worldly. That's often what draws people in. I know it was in my case, 52 years ago.

I was in a room with a few hundred kids and the joy and the love was just obvious. It was real! Palpable. And I said to myself, whatever it is that these folks have caught, I want it.

Our default and we see it daily in our fallen world, our human default is to take. Get you some of that. But Jesus regenerates our fallen selves and suddenly we have a love from a source, not our own, and as christians we want to give. Our joy comes from giving, not taking.

Jesus said; *34 A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.*" Jn. 13:34,35

The Thessalonians were already experiencing this kind of love. They had it in spades. But Paul prays for more;

*12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in **love for one another, and for all people**, just as we also do for you,*

When love spills out all over the place to "all people" as Paul prays for here, the kingdom of God grows. It increases. It was love that swept me in. It wasn't understanding the egghead stuff that made me a christian. It was the draw of the love.

It was love, and a bit of hedonism I suppose, that caused Paul to go to Thessalonica in the first place. Love for all people. Love motivated him to go to perfect strangers and freely give them the gospel. And now he's

praying that same love will abound in them and likewise move out to all people.

It's fine to enjoy the agape love in our fellowship with each other. It's better yet if it spills out of this place and effectively draws people into a relationship with Jesus and us. Paul prayed for abounding love that spills out all over the place. That should be the goal of our instruction. Overflow.

Well we've covered Faith and Love in our outline. You don't suppose Paul will throw in a bit of Hope while he's at it?

13 so that He may strengthen your hearts blameless in holiness, before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Bam. There it is. Broken record Paul. Faith, Hope, Love.

Where does hope fit in this triad that appears so often in scripture. Faith, Hope, Love. Why is hope so very important in this equation.

Faith is the baseline for everything. Revelation. God breathed words. Doctrine. A complete world view based in truths given to us, revealed to us through men who spoke the words of God under the inspiration of God. God breathed scripture.

Everything goes back to the book. God breathed truth. Faith is believing and working out, all of that truth. And faith produces love. Hard preaching makes soft people. Real faith in real truth produces real love for one another, and beyond. We love those within and we love those without.

Faith produces love for the perishing. Right? But faith also produces a hope. Through faith we learn that this world is condemned and is on a path to destruction.

Sodom and Gomorrah were a real event in time that actually happened, but

they are also a picture story that envisions what God has planned for this entire planet. Sodom and Gomorrah are a type. A smaller visual lesson of the larger reality. This world is condemned. Ultimate judgement is coming.

We *ask* the question about hope, *why* is it important, because no one is preaching about imminent judgement. It's a foreign concept to christians these days. So hope has become sort of a non starter. We hear lots of preaching about faith and love, but no one is really too concerned about hope.

Actually, a more realistic scenario, one that first century christians believed and were motivated by is this;

Judgement is imminent. Final destruction of sin is imminent. We are orphaned here for one purpose. Faith produces a love that should compel us to try hard to rescue those who are perishing very soon in a coming judgement.

Me and Pam like to watch that stupid show, Seal Team. Where the Navy Seals are dropped into some enemy territory to carry off some mission. Enemy combatants in the middle of enemy territory, trying to cause havoc for the bad guys and rescue people who are trapped inside.

And what happens in the last 5 minutes? After all the unimagineable danger and underground work to rescue the people trapped inside who would have perished if the Seal Team members had not risked their lives to go inside and rescue them. What happens in the final minutes each week.

The helicopter comes and they all just barely make it on board as rockets are being fired at them and barely missing and somehow they fly away to safety.

Here's the modern church version of Seal Team. No helicopter. Your radio to the guys on the ship who sent you is broke. So you quick get an arab

accent and grow a lot of face hair and you blend in with the enemy because, hey, they're not really so bad after all. You simply just eliminate the danger from the enemy by becoming one of them.

I've never seen that ending on Seal Team, but that's what modern christianity has done. Blend in. Go along to get along. Eliminate the distinctions that set you apart and made you an enemy of this world. Join this world.

If all of the words of this book are true, then hope becomes incredibly important. We are orphans stranded in enemy territory carrying out clandestine attacks against the enemy in his own territory, and we really need to know there's a helicopter coming to get us out of this place.

There's more. Faith in the words of this book has taught us that we have an amazing adoptive Father who has not only forgiven all of our rebellions against Him, but He has adopted us and made us sons in a wildly wealthy family. We are rich beyond our wildest dreams. And we long to see our brother, the Lord, Jesus, face to face, who will take us to dwell with the Father.

We're waiting for that day. Our hope is to hear His voice calling us literally out of this world, up into the heavens, to meet Him face to face and to dwell with Him in His kingdom.

Hope envelops all of those ideas together. Rescue. Meeting face to face. Enjoying the wild riches that are ours in our adoption into God's family. Living forever with the One who loved us and purchased us with His own blood. All of that is what we hope for. And hope causes us to endure.

Hope always revolves around the appearance of Jesus. Our rescuer who purchased us with His blood has promised to return and remove us to safety, with Him. We have a hope built upon the truth that we all who have been called out of this condemned world, we all will see Jesus at the same moment. The living and the dead will meet Him in the air. The living and

the dead will all hear those words, Come Up Here, and we will meet Him in the air.

Listen carefully to the words of Peter. In 1 Peter chapter 1 beginning immediately after the salutation in vs 3, Peter is going to define our hope.

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be **born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, having been kept in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Paul in his prayer is voicing the very same thing that Peter defines so beautifully for us here.

13 so that He may strengthen your hearts blameless in holiness, before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Paul prays to be able to come to his beloved Thessalonians so that he can supply what is lacking in their faith so that they can be built up in love for each other, and all men everywhere who are perishing, so that faith and love will combine together to strengthen their hearts to the ultimate hope.

Paul wants them to be blameless in holiness before their God and Father at the moment when Jesus returns in glory with all of His saints.

OK, egghead time again, just for a moment. So that He. We've got three distinct people getting spoken about in the construction of that verse. This is marvelous.

In vs. 13 we have He, who is the operative person causing the action. We have our God and Father, and we have our Lord Jesus. Who is the He?

The antecedent of the pronoun He in vs. 13 looks back to Himself in vs. 11. And Himself in vs. 11 is both the Father, and the Lord, Jesus. He and Himself are a single person who is also two distinct persons.

I love it! The world might try to dissect what's going on here and say this is impossible gibberish obviously written by a tent maker with missing teeth and poor vision who was under duress.

But I say, No, this is God revealing Himself intimately to my poor little brain that He created not quite big enough to understand the ineffable and inscrutable truths about a God who is far beyond me.

But part of the hope that sustains me; On that day when I see Him, face to face, then I'll fully understand.

There is a final component to hope. Hope that believes Jesus may come at any moment has a purifying effect. What will you be engaged in doing at the moment when the shout comes? ***Come up here?***

We'll close this morning with words directly from the mouth of Jesus written down for us in Luke chapter 12. Faith produces hope, a belief in the return of Jesus, and that belief has a purifying effect on those who believe. What will you be doing, on that day, at that moment?

*35 "Gird up your loins, and keep your lamps lit. 36 And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find awake when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. 38 Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and **finds them so**, blessed are those slaves. 39 "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had*

known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 40 You too, be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.”

This is the tension that the church has dwelt in since Paul wrote his words to the Thessalonians until this day. We don't know the day or hour. It could be before I finish the next sentence.

Jesus and the Father purposely designed this doctrine to be an unknown so that we would keep ourselves pure. Stay ready. What will you be doing at the moment that the call comes? Hope purifies by motivating us to keep being ready. Live in that tension to be pure and ready when Jesus appears.