

# Faithful to the End

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Date: 24 March 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Are you ready for the biggest day of your life? Are you ready for the biggest day of your life? That is not just a question for those of you soon to be married.

It is a question for everyone. Are you ready for the biggest day of your life?

I'm not speaking about your wedding day or your graduation day or even the day your child is born or any other big occasion in life you might have enjoyed in the past or are looking forward to in the future. But like all those days, the day I'm talking about is well worth getting ready for.

Because what all those big days have in common, isn't it, whether it's months of organizing or years of studying, what all those days have in common is that they take a lot of preparation, don't they?

Big days take a lot of getting ready for. But there is a day coming soon that will be far bigger and far better for those of us in Christ than every other day. And it is, I say it is actually a wedding. At the end of the Bible in Revelation 21, the Apostle John sees a vision of what is coming in the future. And what he sees is a wedding between Christ and his church. Just listen to these words. He says, one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were the seven last plagues, came and said to me, come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the spirit to a high mountain, great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem. And it's the church, God's people, coming down out of heaven from God. It's shone with the glory of God. And its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. We all have a wedding day to look forward to, and there is no better way you can be spending your time and energy than getting ready for it. That is the heart of Paul's closing prayer for this dearly beloved church in Thessalonica that he has been writing to. If you want to know what you care deeply about, just look at what you pray for.

[ 3 : 06 ] And we can see an insight, can't we, into what Paul cares deeply about by looking at what he prays for in this letter. If you have a Bible in front, you just flick over the back of page to chapter 3.

And you'll see there at the end of that chapter in verse 13, he says, may God strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

And then back to the end of chapter 5, what does Paul pray again here in verse 23? May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you, that's make you holy through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at becoming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We see, don't we, across both those prayers, we see and hear that Paul's desire is that the Thessalonians be holy and blameless for the returning of Christ.

[ 4 : 30 ] Holy and blameless for the returning of Christ. That is the day Paul wants this church to be living for. That is the day Paul wants us to be looking forward to more than any other day.

And it is a day we should be getting ready for by preparing ourselves, living holy lives.

When big days are coming, we rightly make a point of getting ready for them. And if we truly believe the biggest day of all is coming very soon, it is awaiting each and every one of us, then this is the day we will spend most of our time getting ready for.

And we see three ways, very simply, in these last few verses, that Paul prays we would be prepared for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First thing we see, first of all, Paul prays that we would be sanctified through and through. Being sanctified through and through means every part of our bodies and lives will be changed by the gospel for that glorious day.

[ 5 : 58 ] We've spent the last number of weeks seeing what that looks like in practice, haven't we? What we must do, be doing in order to live holy lives that will present us beautiful and glorious on

that great day.

And the list is helpfully long, I think. We've seen a lot of things, haven't we, since the start of chapter 4. Therefore, use your bodies in pure and holy ways.

Continue to grow in your love for one another. Clothe yourselves with faith, hope, and love.

Acknowledge those who work hard amongst you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you.

Live in peace with one another. Warn the idle and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened. Help the weak.

Be patient with everyone. Strive to do what is good. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. Reject every kind of evil.

[ 7 : 15 ] That is holiness. That is God's will for your life. That is what he wants your life to look like. They're relatively straightforward instructions to understand, aren't they?

But they are much harder to put into practice. We need help. We need help. And Paul knows the Thessalonians needed help too.

And so he brackets this last section of the letter with this repeated prayer. That God would sanctify you through and through.

And it is telling, I think, isn't it, that Paul immediately turns from exhortation to prayer. He turns immediately from commands to prayer.

That is a good path to follow. I think I've said it before, but I'll gladly say it again. God's commands are not a test that he demands us to pass before we can come to him.

[ 8 : 37 ] I mentioned it in the kids' talk this morning as well, but it is something we are all, myself included, so quick to forget, isn't it? God saves us for good work. God saves us for good works.

He does not require good works of us before he will save us. And if those good works are the purpose he has saved us for, you can be absolutely sure that he will delight to help you carry them out.

These are his good and loving instructions that he longs to help you with as you work out a holy life. If you need help living a holy life, and we all do, then pray. Pray for God's help.

Don't just pray for forgiveness when you fail. Pray before you set out, before you set out, even from here this evening, that God would give you the strength to follow his words.

[ 9 : 47 ] And be presented holy and blameless on the last day. And that is a prayer he will delight to answer. He loves to help his children grow in holiness.

And that holiness, as we've seen, will affect every area of our life. There is no part of your life that will go untouched by the gospel.

Through and through, body, soul, and mind, it is all getting ready for the day of Christ. But not only does Paul pray the Thessalonians would be sanctified through and through, he assures them, doesn't he, that that will happen.

With the wonderful words of verse 24. The one who calls you is faithful.

And he will do it. We are sanctified through and through because we are sanctified through the work of God.

[ 11 : 03 ] Paul prays that we be sanctified through and through and assures us that that prayer will be answered. Because it is God's work in us.

And he, our God, is faithful. Faithful. Faithful to his every word. Faithful to his every promise.

Faithful to every one of his people. Brothers and sisters, if you belong to the Lord, he will never let you go.

He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. You may feel you have failed.

You might well have been unfaithful. But he is faithful. Your emotions might wane.

[ 12 : 13 ] Your confidence might falter. But your God will not. He has called you.

And he who has called you has also justified you. And he who has justified you, he also glorifies.

Paul is so confident in your future glorification that he is happy to speak of it as if it has already happened. Not because of his confidence in your ability to follow his words.

But because of his confidence in the faithful God who has called you to himself. He who has called you is faithful.

And he will present you. He will present you. Holy and blameless when Christ returns. You who feel lost in your sin.

[ 13 : 22 ] You who feel little hope for the future. You whose faith is weak. You whose faith is fragile.

Your God is faithful. And that does not change with your age or stage in the Christian walk. It is as true for the young believers in Thessalonica as it was for the Apostle Paul himself. Because the one who called you is faithful.

You can rest assured that the end to which he has called you is what? The one you will arrive at. No matter how distant or far that feels at the moment.

It is, I think, important to remember that this is a glorious word of assurance. For the uncertain faith of a very young church.

[ 14 : 22 ] God's faithfulness in bringing you to this wonderful point we read of here will usually manifest itself in our own desire to grow and obey and love his words.

That is what God's faithfulness will look like in your life. His faithfulness will be your action. Yes, we will fail.

But we will desperately want to live holy lives and do all that we can to do just that. We can know, can't we, that in this pursuit of holiness, we are never alone.

So very far from being alone. The one who calls you is with you. The one who is faithful will get you there.

And he will get you there through the people he places around you. Paul prays that the Thessalonians would be sanctified through and through.

[ 15 : 44 ] He prays that God would bring them to that point. But he closes this letter by reminding them that God will achieve his purposes by sanctifying us through one another.

God will sanctify us through one another. We need to remember, don't we, God is the one who sets all things in motion.

And orchestrates all things according to his divine will. But in that glorious providence, he delights to use our brothers and sisters in Christ.

To bring us to that goal of being presented holy and blameless when Jesus returns. There are three ways, just in these last verses, that Paul highlights here.

That God uses those around us to achieve his purposes. First, just look down there at verse 25. We pray for one another.

[ 16 : 58 ] Brothers and sisters, Paul says. Pray for us. Pray for us. That is an amazing thing for Paul to ask of this Thessalonian church, is it not?

It is a wonderful reminder that there is no hierarchy of prayer. The great apostle Paul does not hesitate to ask the immature Christians of Thessalonica, with their fledgling faith that understands so little, he has no hesitation in asking these brothers and sisters to pray for him and his companions on their missionary journey.

Their prayers are as important as his. Their prayers are as powerful as his. Because again, it is not about the one doing the praying, is it?

It is about the one we are praying to. Your prayers may feel fumbling. Your words might feel muddled.

You might fear what others think of your stuttering and stumbling petitions. But let me assure you, Paul, the apostle Paul, would be delighted to have you pray for him.

[ 18 : 29 ] I would be delighted to have you pray for me, as would every other one of your Christian brothers and sisters. Because what matters is not the quality of our prayer, but the one to whom we pray.

So if you want to be holy, if you want to be beautifully blameless on that last day, beautifully adorned for Christ our Bridegroom, ask for prayer.

Ask for prayer for yourself and pray for others. And he who is faithful will answer those prayers. Your will be done is what we pray in the Lord's prayers.

And this is God's will for us. Paul has said it twice in the last couple of chapters. God's will is that you would be made holy. So pray, brothers and sisters, for the continued sanctification of those in your church family.

Pray for the people in your life group through the week. Make a list of the people you're going to pray for day by day. Set a time aside. To bring them before God.

[ 19 : 45 ] Pray for the people who are sitting next to you on a Sunday. That they would be built up in their love for Christ. Pray for your leaders. Pray for all those whom you love.

Because your prayers, if they are made in faith to the one true living God in the name of Christ, no matter what you might feel about them, your prayers are powerful.

So let us pray for one another. Secondly, we sanctify one another as we greet one another warmly in the Lord.

And the keen-eyed of you will notice that's not exactly what the text says. This is a good lesson in making sure we read God's word in the context it was written into.

Paul is writing specifically to the Thessalonians, isn't he? And so he says, greet one another with a holy kiss. That might translate fine into a church in the South Mediterranean.

[ 20 : 58 ] Not so much in Aberdeen. If Paul were writing to all churches at all times, I think he would probably say something like, greet each other warmly in a culturally appropriate manner.

It doesn't sound quite as good, does it? But you get the point. In our context, that might mean a handshake and a smile, maybe even a warm embrace.

Please do not go around after the service trying to kiss people. The safeguarding coordinators will be on you in a flash. But what significance is there, you might think, in a handshake or a hug?

What does it really matter? I think the answer is probably more than we first think. Imagine a Sunday where you walk into church and no one says hello.

No one shakes your hands. No one smiles at you. No one even looks in your direction. How do you feel?

[ 22 : 11 ] Not only in yourself, but about the others around you after a service like that. Cold, disheartened, discouraged.

Of course you do. But come in and meet others with an embrace and a handshake.

smile and joyfully introduce yourself to new people and to old friends. And receive that same greeting yourself.

And what do you feel? Well, I think you feel at home, don't you? You feel like you are where you belong.

You feel, as you should, like you are surrounded by family. And not only will you be filled with a greater warmth, but a growing love for the people around us.

[ 23 : 27 ] The way we greet each other really matters, doesn't it? And people will grow in their love for Christ when we do something as simple as greeting one another warmly.

And it is such an important thing. I'd encourage you to make a point of it every Sunday as you come in.

To think, who can I greet warmly as you see your family in Christ through the week? Because how we treat one another is how we treat Christ.

Just listen to this parable from Matthew's Gospel that illustrates this point so clearly. This is Jesus speaking and he says, Then the king will say to those on his rights, Come, you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me.

[ 24 : 45 ] I was sick and you look after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink?

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or imprisoned and go to visit you? The king will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

The way we treat Christ's family is reflective of the way we treat Christ. And so we do something so simple as greeting one another warmly and joyfully because we are one family in Christ and as we love one another, we love him and we grow one another in our love for him.

So simple but so significant. Greet one another warmly and joyfully and we will be sanctified through and through by one another.

And thirdly and finally, just very briefly, verse 27, we sanctify one another by bringing the word of God to each other.

[ 26 : 29 ] Paul charges the recipients to have this letter read out amongst everyone. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

Everyone must hear God's word and you must ensure everyone can hear God's word. it is really striking how Paul speaks here because from verse 12 of 1 Thessalonians 5, there have been a lot of exhortations, haven't there?

You just need to glance through those verses to see there are a lot of different instructions, a lot of imperatives, but this here is of a different order altogether.

It is not just another in a long list of instructions. Paul, he literally puts them under oath to have this letter read out amongst the church family.

That is how important it is to Paul that Christ's people hear God's word. There is nothing more important than being under God's word, than bringing people to God's word and bringing God's word to people.

[ 27 : 57 ] If you want to grow in holiness, hear his words. If you want your brothers and sisters to grow in holiness, speak his word to them.

Sit under its teaching Sunday by Sunday. Read it in private and with friends. Study it with one another. Seek to understand it and ask for help when you don't. God's word is the means by which God's church will grow in our holiness, in faith and hope and love.

So we sanctify one another by praying for one another, greeting one another warmly and most importantly of all, speaking God's word both to one another and bringing one another to it.

And Paul ends this letter just where he began it, doesn't he? Pronouncing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ upon this young church.

God's unmerited, undeserved favor and blessing be with you all. Know his grace. Know its presence with you in your walk with him, whatever trials or persecution you might face for the sake of the gospel.

[ 29 : 27 ] God's grace is with you always in all things. So let us get ourselves ready for the biggest day of our lives by praying for God's help in presenting us holy and blameless in his presence.

Let us strive with every effort to build one another up in faith, hope and love dependent in all things on God's faithful help to be sanctified through and through.

That is what Paul wanted for this young church above all else. And that is what he was confident would happen and did happen and will happen for us too because the one who calls us is faithful and he will do it.

Let us pray as we close. Let us pray as we close. Let us pray as we close.