

# PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

by Abri Brancken, 29 Jul 2018

## SCRIPTURE READING

### 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

## INTRODUCTION

This week my office at our church facilities were destroyed by a fire. I lost a lot of personal items and both my computers. It has been a difficult week and during such difficult times verses like 1 Thes 5:16-18 might seem confusing and over optimistic. These commands seem almost impossible to obey. Rejoice always! Pray continually! Who can do that? If Paul had only said, "Rejoice a lot, pray often, and try to be thankful," we might feel that it is achievable, but "I rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks!"

## JESUS WEPT

The shortest verse in the Greek New Testament is (1 Thess. 5:16), "Rejoice always." The shortest verse in the English New Testament is (John 11:35), "Jesus wept."

It seems that not even Jesus rejoiced all the time, so how can Paul expect us to do it? Think about that for a moment.

## WHAT PAUL MEANT WITH THESE 3 COMMANDS

So, what does Paul mean when he commands, "Rejoice always"? We have discussed in previous sessions the importance of understanding the context of Bible verses that we are reading. Let's consider the background.

- Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth.
- It is generally dated c. a.d. 51
- 1 Thessalonians is Paul's earliest canonical letter.
- Thessalonica was a bustling seaport city, an important communication and trade center. It was the largest city in Macedonia and was also the capital of its province.
- The background of the Thessalonian church is found in Ac 17:1–9.
- Since Paul began his ministry there in the Jewish synagogue, it is reasonable to assume that the new church included some Jews. However, 1:9–10; Ac 17:4 seem to indicate that the church was largely Gentile in membership.
- Paul had left Thessalonica abruptly (see Ac 17:5–10) after a rather brief stay.
- Recent converts from paganism (1:9) were thus left with little external support in the midst of persecution. Paul's purpose in writing this letter was to encourage the new converts in their trials (3:3–5) and to give instruction concerning godly living (4:1–12) and to give assurance concerning the future of believers who die before Christ returns (4:13–18).
- Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ.

## **REJOICE ALWAYS**

v.16 Rejoice always...

When we are in difficult trials or if people have mistreated us because of our faith, we have a choice: either we can focus on our trials and lapse into self-pity. Or, we can set our minds on the things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God, where our life is hidden in Him (Col. 3:1-4), and rejoice. We need to see the bigger picture and bring eternity & God's Kingdom into our daily lives or else we will lose focus. We must focus on Christ, who He is and what we are in Him. There are so many riches that God has freely given you in Christ. Ephesians 1:3-14 says that you have all spiritual blessings in Him. God chose you in Him before the foundation of the world. In love, He predestined you to adoption as His child. He freely bestowed His grace on you in Christ. In Him you have redemption and forgiveness of all your sins, lavished upon you by His grace, etc.

"Rejoicing always" is a conscious attitude of contentment, hope, and happiness that comes from deliberately focusing on Christ and the treasures that we have received freely from Him.

Paul might have thought of Jesus' words (Matt. 5:11-12):

"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The book of James (1:2-3) says: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."

## **PRAY WITHOUT CEASING**

v 17 pray continually...

God commands us to pray without ceasing. What does this command mean? The concept without ceasing was used of repeated military attacks. An army would attack a city but not succeed. They would regroup and attack over and over until they won the victory. Even so, our prayers should be frequent and persistent. Knock and keep on knocking. Through prayer that we lay hold of the riches that we have in Christ, which are the source of true joy. Prayer claims the promises of God in our trials. Laying hold of God's promises brings joy, because we know that He is for us. As Paul wrote (Rom. 8:31-32), "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

Begin to make short prayers whenever you can. Spend time in God's word and prayer each morning.

There is a spirit of dependence that should permeate all we do. This is the very spirit and essence of prayer. So, even when we are not speaking consciously to God,

there is a deep, abiding dependence on him that is woven into the heart of faith. In that sense, we "pray" or have the spirit of prayer continuously. We need to be praying repeatedly and often. Praying without ceasing means not giving up on prayer.

## **GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING**

God commands us to give thanks in everything. What does this command mean? This command means that in every situation we are to give thanks to our sovereign and good God and Savior. In Ephesians 5:20, Paul puts it, "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."

We must deepen our understanding of God's sovereignty and goodness. The story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) illustrates this truth. Joseph's brothers hated him and planned to kill him until they saw a caravan of traders heading toward Egypt. So they cruelly sold their brother into slavery. He ended up getting thrown in prison, even though he obeyed God by resisting the advances of Potiphar's wife. He begged the cup bearer to mention his case to Pharaoh so that he could be released, but the cup bearer forgot. Two years later, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream and was instantly elevated to the second most powerful position in the country.

Thankfulness will be our habit when trust in God is our habit. Thankfulness and trust are bound together. Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4)

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite of challenges that we face, we keep our eyes on Jesus. We look at the bigger picture. God can change every situation to give Him glory. When the enemy (devil) comes to kill, steal and destroy, God can even let those attacks work out for the good of His children and for His glorification. Satan thought that by killing Jesus he would win, yet, it brought about his total defeat. When we are attacked by the devil and his forces, God can use those attacks and change the outcome towards victory for His children. God knows no defeat! We have to remain in Him and keep our eyes on Him daily.

### **Romans 8:28**

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those

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