Apostolic prayers - *Paul's Prayer in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5*

1. Introduction

a. Today we remain in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians and his prayer at the end of chapter two into chapter three. As we saw last week the church in Thessalonica had withstood much persecution with faith and love and Paul encourages them to persevere and not give up.

b. Hence when Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in Thess. 1:11-12 he prayed for the saints to be strengthened in the midst of persecution to respond to Jesus in a way *worthy of Him*—in wholeheartedness—so as to walk in the fullness of their destiny. Paul planted the church in Thessalonica in the midst of persecution in just three weeks.

Acts 17:1-9 *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came*
to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. **2** *And Paul went in, as was his custom,*
and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, **3** *explaining and proving that*
it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I
proclaim to you, is the Christ." **4** *And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as*
did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. **5** *But the Jews were*
jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar,
and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. **6** *And when they could not*
find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These
men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, **7** *and Jason has received them,*
and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." **8** *And*
the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. **9** *And when they*
had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

c. We see in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians that Paul had sent Timothy to them from Athens to encourage them not to be shaken in persecution. Paul is clear that affliction was to be expected.

1 Thess.3:1-4 *Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens*
alone, **2** *and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker*[g] *in the gospel of Christ, to establish*
and exhort you in your faith, **3** *that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know*
that we are destined for this.

d. Hence these prayers help us to partner with the Lord as we pray for those who are suffering persecution and affliction and also help us to align our hearts with God's heart as we see the church coming under persecution for our faith in Christ.

Matt. 5:11-12 **11** *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil*
against you falsely on my account. **12** *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so*
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

2. Prayer that the Lord comfort and establish His people (2 Thes. 2:16-17)

16 *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal*
comfort and good hope through grace, **17** *comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work*
and word.

In 2 Thess. 2:3-12 Paul taught them about Jesus' second coming and the Antichrist doing great miracles to deceive many. In light of this in v.15 he exhorted them to stand firm and then prayed that the Lord would comfort and establish them in the persecution.

2Thess.2:15-17 *[15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.[16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father,* ***who loved us*** *and gave us* ***eternal comfort*** *and good hope through grace, [17]* ***comfort your hearts*** *and* ***establish them in every good work and word****.*

a. ***Who loved us***: God's love is the basis of our confidence that the Lord will answer this prayer. Divine love is the fountain or origin of all blessings that are given to us as a free gift by grace.

b. ***Eternal comfort***: Paul emphasised the reality of eternal glory to strengthen the Church in the face of persecution. The assurance of eternal comfort provides temporal encouragement. We will receive a 100-fold recovery of all that we lost in being persecuted. This is our **good hope.**

c. ***Comfort your hearts***: In view of their persecutions, they needed to be comforted by the Holy Spirit to enable them to stand firm. The Father is designated, "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3). Persecution impacts on our emotions and wellbeing but God's comfort heals those wounds and replaces them with love, joy and peace.

d. ***Establish you in every good word and work***: He prayed for them to be energised by God's grace so that they would be established or steadfast in the face of persecution, temptation, and labours in the kingdom. *Good word* means sound doctrine, and *every good work* refers to their godly lifestyle and kingdom activity. There is a natural tendency in our heart to drift from steadfastness but sound doctrine can keep us steady.

2 Peter 3:17 *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.*

Psalm 119:174-176 *I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight. [175] Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me. [176] I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.*

e. Paul's prayer in 2:17 is for the Spirit's help to obey, in the same way as he prayed in 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13.

[10] as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? [11] Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, [12] and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, [13] so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

f. ***Perfect what is lacking in your faith***: This is a prayer that the Spirit would bring them to fullness in every area related to their spiritual life and ministry. He desires to perfect what is *lacking*, i.e. our deficiencies in understanding, dedication, unity, motivations, resources, etc.

g. ***Abound in love***: In praying that we abound in love, he asks that the Spirit inspire us in three ways: to abound in greater understanding of God's love for us; to tenderise our hearts so that we abound in love for Jesus; and to cause love to overflow in us for others. Jesus asked the Father to impart the very love that He has for Jesus into our hearts (John. 17:26).

John. 17:26 *…that the love with which You [the Father] loved Me [Jesus] may be in them.*

h. ***Establish your hearts blameless in holiness***: Paul's concern was that the saints live in such a way that, when Jesus returns, they will be found walking blameless in all the light that the Spirit gives them; that is, to live without any conscious compromise. He prayed that the saints be transformed so as to respond in a way that is worthy of Jesus and bring glory to Him on that Day that He returns so we will not be ashamed of our lifestyle at His coming.

1 John 2:28 *And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.*

3. Prayer that the word of God be released in power (2 Thes. 3:1)

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured, as happened among you

a. Paul asked them to pray that the influence of God's Word would spread rapidly through his ministry. Paul both prayed and requested prayer for himself and his co-workers.

b. ***That the Word may speed ahead***: Paul wanted prayer that the "influence" of the Word would increase rapidly among both believers and unbelievers. Jesus promised that the Spirit would supernaturally convict the people of sin. Such anointed preaching that pierces the heart in a deep way is sometimes more powerful than healings.

John. 16:8 *[8]He [the Spirit] will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and judgment.*

c. Throughout history, when the spirit of conviction has been fully manifested, the Word took hold of the hearts of people until they were powerfully converted as seen in Acts 2 and 19.

Acts 2:37-43 *[37] Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [38] And Peter said to them, "Repent ……. [41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. [42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles*

Acts 19:10,20 *[10] This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord from the revival in Ephesus), ……. [20] So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*

d. ***That the Word may be honoured***: The Word is honoured (or glorified) when the Spirit releases miracles and conviction when the Word is proclaimed via preaching, singing, conversations, writing, media, etc.

e. ***As happened among you***: The Lord released His power through Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and there was a mighty move of the Spirit and many came to faith.

1 Thes. 1:5 *[5]Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit…*

Acts 17:4 *[4]And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks…*

f. The study of past revival shows how God works and how much He is willing to do through prayer. Jonathan Edwards preached the famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. He read it by candlelight in the evening meetings, yet people wailed under the conviction of sin. George Whitefield and John Wesley also witnessed the power of conviction in England. Whitefield spoke to crowds of over ten thousand people who often cried out as the power of God descended on them.

g. Charles Finney was a lawyer who was baptized with fire in his preaching. In 1857, he preached in New York City and claimed to see 500,000 new converts in eight weeks, about 60,000 a week.

4. Prayer that the Lord deliver His people from evil men (2 Thes. 3:2-4)

2 *and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.* ***3*** *But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.*

a. Paul prayed that they be delivered from wicked men and guarded from Satan/ Paul did not pray for the total removal of wicked men who persecute the church, knowing that this will only happen when Jesus returns (2 Thes. 1:6-9).

b. Some of God's people will be martyred in the end time but the Lord promised to help some believes who are being persecuted without promising to deliver all of them.

Dan. 11:32-35 *[32]The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits [miracles]… [34]When they fall [martyrs], they shall be aided with a little help [to escape martyrdom]…[35]Some of those of understanding shall fall [martyrs], to refine them, purify them…"*

5. Prayer that God direct them into love and perserverance (2 Thes. 3:5)

5 *May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

a. Paul prayed that the Spirit lead them into God's love and the perseverance of Jesus. These are two of the highest points of the Spirit's transforming work, so we walk worthy of God.

b. ***Direct your hearts to the love of God***: This prayer parallels Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:12. It takes God to love God. The power of the end times is found in walking in the love of God. This includes the supernatural ability to feel God's love and then to feel love back to God.

c. ***Direct your hearts into the patience of Christ***: This parallels Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. There is a fourfold perseverance seen in the Scripture that requires the Spirit's strength to walk in:

i ***Perseverance to resist temptation***: This requires denying our flesh in obeying the Lord.

James 1:12 *[12]Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

ii ***Perseverance in trials***: This speaks of loving God in difficult circumstances

James 1:2-4 *[2]…count it all joy when you fall into various trials, [3]knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience...[4]that you may be perfect and complete…*

iii ***Perseverance in persecution***: He rewards those who are faithful in persecution.

Matt. 5:11-12 *[11]"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you…for My sake. [12]Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven…"*

iv ***Perseverance over many years***: Being sluggish includes drawing back from contending for the fullness of God's promises and for a breakthrough of the Spirit in our life

Heb. 6:11-12 ***11*** *And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,* ***12*** *so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*