

Text: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13. First Sunday in Advent. **November 29, 2015.**

Grace and peace are yours through our coming Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Are you ready for Christmas? Don't remind me about all I have to do. I won't give the list, you've already thought of it. Or if you are a guy, you thought, "That's right, guess I better stop at Kwik Trip on the way home and buy a few gift cards. But I still have a month." Don't worry you won't get the annual scolding from pastor about how bad all the busy-ness is and presents and trees and shopping just distract us from Jesus. Presents can remind us of the greatest present, Jesus. And what better time of year to show love to others than the time of year we remember that God showed his great love to us? Trees can focus our eyes on the greatest tree ever, the tree where Jesus died. Won't it be nice when you don't have to shop anymore, because everything is free? What? Where's that? Everything free? Can you text me the address? Don't put it on facebook, I don't want too many people to know. Ok, here it is. The streets are lined with gold. There's all inclusive all you can eat all the time. It's heaven. That's where all Christians will be when Jesus comes. We don't need to be afraid for Jesus to come. We need to be ready for Jesus to come. Answer our theme question with confidence! Yes! I am ready for Jesus to come!

But what will it take to be ready for Jesus to come? How about some thanks. That attitude of thanks that didn't stop Friday, that attitude will help us be ready for Jesus to come. This is a fascinating phrase, "How can we thank God enough for you?" How can we? What thanks can we give back to God that is equivalent to forgiveness of all our sins, eternal life, the promise that all things work together for good for those who love him? What thanks can we give? How can it ever be enough?

We are at a loss for words, and so is Paul. That fascinated me. God used Paul to write many books of the Bible. Paul always has plenty of words, terms to pile up one on the other. But when it comes to thanks to God for the people God has brought to faith, Paul is speechless. Paul doesn't know what to say. All he can stammer out is, "How can we thank God enough?" We can't.

We will just revel in all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you! We will keep on rejoicing with joy. We will keep on thanking God for this joy he has given us. This hit me personally as Pastor Paul spoke to the members of the congregation at Thessalonica. Thanks. Joy. Keep on rejoicing. Sorry I don't say this enough, but I thank God for every one of you. More than once a week. I say extra thanks to God for every one of you here. And I have an extra special joy at your presence today and every day.

Yes, just your presence brings joy. You could have slept in, watched pregame, stayed hunting, done a million other things. But you got up, got in your car and came to God's house. Your leaving this morning left a testimony to your neighbors. You came here. Your presence gives joy to everyone here. Your presence is reason for thanks. Just your car being here makes an impression to those at the dog park and your staying here for treats and Bible class makes an impression. Sweet, pastor said I have to stay for treats because it makes a good impression. Seriously. We had someone who came to our church for the first time several years ago. Being first time, they left after worship, ran some errands and drove back past church an hour after service was over. This person told me, "I couldn't believe how many cars were still there. Why were all these people sticking around?" That made an impression. That person joined our church and is filled with joy. How can we thank God enough? How can we show our joy? Thanks. Joy. These will help us be ready for Jesus to come.

Night and day we pray most earnestly. Most earnestly. This is a very strong and very unusual word. It's only used a few times in the entire Bible. Pray most earnestly for your brothers and sisters here who give you joy. Pray for them most earnestly, pray for them night and day to be ready for Jesus to come. Pray that all of us may have supplied what is lacking in our faith.

Now, please don't for a second misunderstand this phrase, supply what is lacking your faith. Don't think that anyone is saying the Christians in Thessalonica didn't have faith. Don't think that pastor would suggest you don't have faith if you don't have the entire Bible memorized. But just as an army going into battle needs constant supplies, constant reinforcements, so we need a constant supply and constant reinforcements to our faith. This word for faith is not just what a person believes, this word for faith has the idea of everything that a Christian is to believe, everything the Bible teaches, everything that is part of this one, definite faith. And just like no soldier can ever be perfectly prepared and supplied for every situation that might arise in battle, so we will never be so arrogant to think that we have the perfect faith.

Maybe our faith is lacking instruction. Maybe you have finished Bible 101 and 201 and even 301, but for every one thing you learned, you realized four things you still had to learn. We still need God to supply those four more things for us to be fully ready for Jesus to come.

Maybe it's something deeper we lack. Maybe it's attitude. Maybe you've had all the instruction, but it's hard to grasp it. It's still really hard to approach the Bible with the humble attitude, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." And it's much easier to approach God with the attitude, "God, tell me what I have already decided I want to hear. God, I hope you agree with what's popular because that's all I'm really up for." And is the problem that the Bible is unclear, or is the problem that our attitude is clouded by sin? Sometimes what's lacking is just ignorance or time. Sometimes things are lacking in our faith because of our sinful attitudes.

What about doubts? Maybe doubts are not at all lacking in your faith, you have plenty of them. I've never seen God. How do I know he's real? God promised, "All things work together for good to those who love God." Well, I've had plenty of garbage happen to me and ain't no good ever come out of that. Jesus promised to come, but that was 2000 years ago, why is he taking so long? Maybe he's not really coming. If that's the way Jesus keeps promises, why bother?

Yeah, why bother? Because believe or not, doubt it or not, Jesus already came. He came with a perfect life, not just to provide us some more instruction, but to credit his perfect life to you. Really. All of Jesus' holy life in on your account with God! How's that for some perfect instruction! How's that to supply the holiness that was lacking! What about our sinful attitudes? Jesus died for those. Jesus didn't wait for us to shape up to love us. Jesus forgave us. Jesus died for us. Jesus washed us clean of sinful attitudes. Baptism proves it. Speaking of proof, what about rock solid, undeniable, 2000 year old proof? That's what we find in Jesus' empty tomb. All my doubts are gone, empty as that tomb. All my fears have left, just like his body left that grave. He rose! There's the eraser to wipe away doubts. He lives! There's the proof to give us confidence. His body and blood, given and poured out for you, stand as personal assurance, your own private forgiveness.

Jesus lived and Jesus died and Jesus rose, this removes the obstacles to faith, this kicks the devil out of the picture, this clears the way to be ready for Jesus to come. We thanked with thanks. We rejoiced with joy. But we haven't gotten to love. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other.

You get the sense that there aren't enough words for how much love. The most earnest prayer is not just that love increase, but that it also overflow. Would you ever say anyone loved you too much? Wouldn't you be happy to have love overflow, that is was more than you needed? Would you ever tell someone, "Please stop showing so much love to me, it's just too much?" What? How can you not be moved by these words? How can we not feel the joy and the love that these Christians had for each other? How much will we be moved to love! There can never be too much love. It can never overflow enough, increase enough. This love will get us ready for Jesus to come.

This love will help us stay strong. It's easy for our hearts to grow weak. Yeah, I love Jesus, but I'm just so busy. Yeah, I'm thankful, but there's always the next bill. Yeah, I have joy, but some people just aren't that easy to get along with. That's why God strengthens our hearts so that we see what will be. You will be blameless. Wow! You ever think about that, being blameless? Standing before God and saying, "God you can't blame me for anything." Because God already blamed Jesus for our sins. You will be holy. Holy! Holy! Yes. You really are holy in the eyes of God. Good thing, because God said, "Be holy, as I the Lord your God, am holy." God said, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." But we have holiness because Jesus gave it to us! We are holy because that's what God has declared us to be! You will be blameless. You will be holy.

You will be holy when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Good thing I'm holy, because when Jesus comes, he's only bringing the holy ones with him. Who are these holy ones? Angels? They certainly are holy, but that's not what this word usually refers to. Grandma? She was a pretty good person. I hope she's with Jesus. What about you? Are you one of these holy ones? Will you be one of the people coming with Jesus when Jesus returns? Yes! All Christians are holy. Yes! The term holy ones refers to believers. You are holy. You will be coming back with Jesus. When he comes it's like a king, or emperor is coming. God is coming. And you will be coming back with Jesus!

You get to be face to face with Jesus when he comes. We will have joy in the presence of our God. We will be holy in the presence of our God, when the Lord Jesus comes and appears face to face with us. Don't be afraid for Jesus to come. Don't be afraid to meet him. You are holy. You are blameless. You are ready for Jesus to come. Amen.