

The Third Sunday In Advent (December 17, 2017)	1711
O. T. Lesson: Isaiah 61:1-3, 10,11	Service of Word and Sacrament: p. 26
Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	Morning Praise: p. 45
Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28	30
Text: I Thessalonians 5:16-24	Psalm 71
Theme: <u>As We Wait For Jesus.</u>	33
I. God's will for our lives.	34
II. God's guidance for our lives.	(37)
III. God's power in our lives.	28

May the God of peace fill you with all joy in believing!

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer!

Dear friends who await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,

There are many who are especially happy this month, many who will have a very joyous Christmas, because they will be together with their family. As the children grow up, they move away from home, sometimes far away. Mom and Dad don't get to see them very often, and they miss them. The children look forward to going home for the holidays. The grandchildren long to see Grandma and Grandpa. How anxiously moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, and children wait to see their loved ones. For many people the entire schedule this month is geared toward preparing for their family get-together. They eagerly look forward to that day when they can welcome their family home.

Someone dearer is coming. He came once before, born of a virgin and laid in a manger, our Lord Jesus, of course. It is his coming we celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate not just because a special child was born, but because that special child won our salvation, and has promised to come again on the last day to take us to be with him forever in heaven. How much more does Jesus' coming fill our hearts with anticipation and joy! How much more does it change our schedules and our lives as we wait for Jesus to come! From these closing verses of Paul's letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, let us consider God's will for our lives, God's guidance for our lives, and God's power in our lives -- As We Wait For Jesus.

Despite this joyous time of year, there are a lot of sad and bitter people in our world. I have met some of them while making visits on people who don't have a church. They say that people are cruel. They say that life is unfair. They are unhappy with their life, unhappy with themselves. They can't find any answers for life's problems, and

instead of looking to the Lord for help, many of them blame the Lord for their difficulties. Why are these people sad and bitter? Because they don't understand that they have a Savior who has taken away their sin and made peace between them and God, a Savior who offers them help in life's difficulties, a Savior who offers them true meaning for life and countless blessings, a Savior who offers finally eternal salvation in heaven, free from all of the problems that sin has brought into our world and our lives. Unfortunately, they don't understand God's will for their lives.

God doesn't want us to be sad, depressed and bitter. Instead, what does his word say? "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." How can we be joyful always? It's easy to be joyful in good times, but what about all those troubles and difficulties that cause us sorrow?

The person who trusts Christ can be joyful even in the midst of sorrow. Why? Because we know that Christ controls all things, and so anything that causes us sorrow is something our Savior permitted to come to serve our good. Romans 8 assures us: "In all things God works for the good of those who love him." God uses our sorrows to draw us closer to himself. If we never had any difficulties, how many of us would see any need for God in our lives? We wouldn't. God uses our difficulties to teach us to trust in him. This is why the Apostle Paul said, "We rejoice in our suffering." (Romans 5:3) But there is one thing that our sorrows and troubles can never do. They can never separate us from God's love. As Romans 8 states: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us...(Nothing) will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." God promises to watch over us and care for us in our troubles. So when some difficulty comes our way, it's no big deal. It's not the end of the world, and if it were, that would be fine, because then Jesus would be here to take us away from our troubles forever in heaven.

In the early Christian church, there wasn't much to be joyful about, that is humanly speaking. The believers were persecuted, and most of them were poor. Still they had a joy in Christ which nothing and no one could take from them.

We know what we should do with our difficulties. We should take them to the Lord in prayer. That's what we are told to do next, "pray continually." That also sounds impossible, doesn't it! How can a person pray nonstop without taking time out at least to eat and sleep? Paul is not suggesting that we sit at all times with our hands folded, our eyes closed and our heads bowed in conscious prayer. We can pray simply with our thoughts. As Christians we commit all things at all times to the Lord. Since this is our whole attitude, it is also natural for us to express it outwardly in words of petition, praise and thanks.

Often we are quick to ask God for what we need, but not so quick to thank him when he grants our requests. Paul reminds us, "Give thanks in all circumstances." Remember the ten lepers? Jesus healed all ten of them from their terrible disease. But only one of them returned to thank Jesus. Jesus' question, "Where are the other nine?" shows us that Jesus looks for and delights in our thankfulness. Let us recognize that all we are and have is from the Lord. No matter what God has given to us; no matter what circumstances he has placed us into, let us be thankful, and live that thanks by serving him in our particular circumstances.

After the angel announced to Mary that the Savior would be born, Mary replied,

"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." The angel told the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people." After the shepherds had seen the Savior, they returned "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." Aged Simeon prayerfully waited for the Christ to be born. Finally, holding that Child in his arms, he exclaimed: "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation." As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, and as we await his second coming in glory, may those same attitudes fill our hearts, true joy, praise and thanks, and sincerity in prayer. "This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Not only does God tell us his will for our lives. He also guides our lives so that we are joyful, thankful and prayerful. God guides us through his word. The Bible is so important to us because it is our only contact with God. In prayer we speak to God. In his word God speaks to us. In regard to God's word, the Apostle says, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil."

The "Spirit's fire" is the fire of faith; that miracle worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that causes us to trust God and gives us a burning desire to serve the Lord. How could we put that fire out? Well, faith feeds only upon God's word. If we were to stop hearing, studying and learning God's word, then obviously that fire of faith would burn out.

Paul emphasizes the importance of God's word by adding, "Do not treat prophecies with contempt." The term "prophecies" again refers to God's revealed word. A prophet is simply one who speaks a message from God to people. The Bible is made up of many prophecies. Don't treat God's word with contempt, or empty it of all authority. Don't refuse to recognize the words of Scripture as the inspired words of God. There are so many today who reject the doctrine of verbal inspiration of Scripture. They treat the Bible with contempt by putting it on the same level as man's word. They disregard verses, chapters and whole books as they choose. God forbids us to treat his word with such contempt.

Instead we are to use God's word to "test everything." The word "test" is the Greek word used for testing the genuineness of such things as gold and silver. If there were any impurities in these precious metals, they failed the test. God wants us to use his pure word to test everything, as the faithful Bereans of noble character, who received Paul's message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. When people teach and proclaim God's word, we are to test what they say and see if it agrees with God's word in the Bible. We are to be on constant lookout for any human impurities that might be brought into the precious truths God has revealed.

Once we have tested for genuineness, we are to act upon what we have found. If we have found that what we are testing is good according to the standard of God's word, then we are to "hold on to" it. Those things that are in full accord with God's word we are to hold on to so tightly that no one can pry us loose.

On the other hand, if we find something that is not in full agreement with the Bible, something impure, something evil, we are to avoid it, to keep ourselves far away from it. "Avoid every kind of evil." God wants us to put a lot of distance between ourselves and whatever conflicts even in a small way with his pure word.

When Jesus was born, there weren't very many people who were ready for him.

There weren't very many people who even had any idea what was going on. Remember when the Magi came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" No one knew anything about the fact that the promised Savior of the world had been born. Why not? Because the people had drifted away from God's word. As we celebrate the coming of our Lord, and wait for him to come again, the most important thing for us to do is to remain close to God's word, remain true to God's word, guided by that word.

The Apostle Paul gives us no less than eight commands in these verses to govern our lives as we wait for Jesus to come. "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances; do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt; test everything; hold on to the good; and avoid every kind of evil." surely we realize that we haven't done these things perfectly. We need the forgiveness that our Savior won for us by coming to our world to live and die in our place. And surely we realize that in our sinfulness, we are not able to keep these commands perfectly. We need God's power in our lives. It is the power of God that has won our salvation in Christ. It is the power of God that has called us and brought us to faith, making that salvation our own. It is also that power of God in our lives that will keep us in faith, that will keep us ready and waiting for Jesus to return again at the last day. Therefore Paul prays that God would sanctify us, completely, every part of us; that God would set us apart as his holy people to serve him in our lives, at all times and in every way. "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." May God in his almighty power prepare us to properly celebrate our Lord's birth this Christmas, and may he keep us blameless and ready as we wait for Jesus to come again.

Amen.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority now and forever. Amen.