

LSB 1 Thess. 5:16 - 28 Part 1

*16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

*19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophecies, 21 but examine all things; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.*

*23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it.*

*25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I implore you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

We have come to the end of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. I have enjoyed these weeks and months spent in this book. So many important topics that are pertinent to our position as the church finds itself in the year 2022.

We began on March 13 and will finish probably next Sunday, so about 6 months to work through this book, this letter from Paul. And what a phenomenal bunch of doctrines we have looked at together in this single short book so far. Allow me to recap what we've covered together in 1st Thess.

Election. Godly Leadership. Effective ministry. The Pre-eminence of Revelation, God's word. The Power of Love. The Necessity of suffering. Faith Hope and Love. Excellence. Moral Purity according to the Authority of God's Revelation. Setting aside both Moral Purity and Authority of this book. The Rapture of the Church. The Day of the Lord. Our appointment with Salvation (pre-tribulation rapture). How Shepherds treat sheep. How

Sheep treat shepherds. How the Saints help One Another.

That's a lot of sound doctrine from one book in a relatively short time. Our brother Carl was right to recommend we study the letters to the Thessalonians as we embark on our civilization literally sliding over a cliff as we watch them fall. The doctrines we've covered are very timely to us, and there's MORE to come in 2nd Thess.

This morning we begin Paul's closing remarks. And it's almost as if he's filled up the papyrus available to him with ink and he has a little tiny space at the bottom left, and the brother who is going to carry the letter to the church is tapping his feet waiting for Paul to finish.

That's how these final things strike me. Staccato fire of topics that are absolutely huge. Each one of these should be developed into main topics and they are in other places by Paul, but not this time. Again he's cramming impossibly large doctrines in an impossibly small space.

What do you tell a church that is born in tumult, you were ripped away from it, you wondered if it has survived at all, and news comes back that it has not only survived but is thriving. Paul has already covered some momentous doctrines that we've recapped. He closes his epistle by saying, just do these little things and you'll be fine. And then he spits out mountains to climb as if it was a throw away line almost. Although he's taught us, there are no throw away lines in this book.

*16 Rejoice always;  
17 pray without ceasing;  
18 in everything give thanks,  
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Wow! A better preacher could spend a year in those 19 words. 16 words in the greek. Don't worry, I'm not that good of a preacher.

Three things to continuously do without ever stopping. Rejoice. Pray.

Thank God. No matter the circumstances you're in, never stop. Ever. For any reason. Ever. Got it? OK, you're dismissed. Just kidding.

*16 Rejoice always;* Verb. Requires action. Present Imperative Active, second person plural.

You! All of you!! I have an imperative command for everyone! Actually I have three of them! Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks.

The tenses of the words are Paul in command form to every person who is included within the collective body of called out believers. This isn't a suggestion. This is an imperative.

I'm retired these days so I don't have too many people giving me imperative commands these days. Only one boss left. Miss Pam. Sorry honey but I have to resort to personal experience. Every once in a while I'll be in the middle of whatever important thing I'm doing and Miss Pam might be on a step stool getting something off a shelf and she might have dislodged things so everything's going to fall out on the ground if she can't get some help. Quick! And I might not be moving fast enough. And she might say; NOW!!! I need you right now!

Sort of like the operating physician saying STAT! This needs to happen immediately. Right now. That's an imperative. Don't do anything else. Your priority is THIS, mister. Right now. The imperative voice!

And that's how Paul's readers would have understood his short command. Rejoice! Don't stop. Ever. Pray! Don't stop. Ever. Be Thankful! Don't stop. Ever.

Does that seem unrealistic? Like, really Paul? If you understood my current circumstances you'd realize that joy is impossible for me.

52 years ago I wrote something in the fly leaf of my Bible. If having the Lord Jesus is the basis for my joy, I'll never have a reason to not have joy.

Pretty simple stuff, right. Simplistic? Not at all. Not at all.

Out where I used to work there were guys who spent an inordinate amount of time (your tax dollars at work) pouring over the different accounts that registered the numbers that represented their wealth. When the stock market would have a big correction and the numbers all got smaller, those guys were moping around like a little kid when dad backed the car over the puppy.

Or the people who get jilted by some person who they were banking on to make them happy for the rest of their life, and they can't seem to move forward.

Or my personal favorites, the politically hopeful motivated people who are high high high when they're anticipating how it's going to be when whatever messiah they're worshipping is going to be elected, and then, the messiah doesn't get elected. Or turns out to be powerless to change anything. Sad folks.

Or how about a guy with a barn or two full of antique irreplaceable cars. Happy guy, until the fire. Or the guy with the body of a greek god, the women fall down at his feet, until the cancer came.

What is it that's the base line of your joy? Your family, your husband, your kids, your health, your comfort, your stuff, your bankroll, combinations of all of the above? Beloved, that's all the world has. How many of you have met some dour old person who is living out their days in bitterness.

Everything the world has that joy can be rooted in can vanish overnight. Think about it. There's nothing new under the sun. A few generations from Adam, God says to Satan, what do you think about my servant Job. And Satan says, big deal, he's got joy because you've poured out every good thing on top of him. Take it all away and he'll curse you. He's no different than anybody else.

I can sort of picture a sideline conversation. What about his wife? No, leave her, she's already sort of an asset on my team. Take everything else away from him though. Done. And poor old Job doesn't have a clue what's going on behind the curtains, but he doesn't curse God. He gets close but he doesn't cross over that line. He curses his birth day, his existence. He's pretty miserable scraping boils, sitting in ashes. His wife telling him to curse God and die.

But Job says; 25 . . . *I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end He will stand upon the earth.* 26 *Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God....* Job 19

Listen, this is why it's so important to take an inventory of the root of your source for joy. Because if your source is things in this world, not only can they vanish in a moment, but the other side of the coin is this. If your joy is rooted only in things of this world, perishable things in this world, that's idolatry.

Our joy, christian joy is rooted in something we have that no one can take away. The Lord Jesus who lives in our hearts has told us, *I will never leave you nor will I forsake you.* 5 *Make sure that your way of life is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"* 6 *so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"* Heb. 13:5,6

The writer of Hebrews says Don't love money, which is idolatry and vanishes away, love Jesus who who never leaves, never fails. Base your joy in riches that will never leave, never fail.

There is a key to real joy in those words from Hebrews that the world doesn't understand. Contentment. *being content with what you have*

Every war, every conflict, every revolution including the crumbling of our own nations basis of wealth, free enterprise, is based in those words. Be

content with what you have. Marxism is a non workable system to make everyone have the same thing. Everyone is equal. If everyone is equal, everyone is content, right. Wrong. No one is content in that satanic system

Contentment is only possible in a fallen world for christians who have their source of joy and riches set in place for them, in another world. Our status in this world is secondary and temporary. True riches await us.

Last week we spoke about Paul's method. He doesn't just show up and order you to rejoice always. First he tells you how rich you are! After Jesus who holds all things together by the Word of His power, we are the richest beings in all of the universes.

Perhaps soon we'll study the book of Ephesians together and we'll try to understand the incomprehensible wealth that is waiting in heaven for us. Let me read you a sentence or two.

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, 5 by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He caused to abound to us in all wisdom and insight, 9 making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him 10 for an administration of the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth in Him. 11 In Him, we also have been made an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who first have hoped in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the*

*Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.* Eph.

1:3-14

Am I really going to tackle that, one word at a time? Am I that brave? Or foolish? What a catalog of wealth. He has given us all things.

He chose us to be blameless in His Son. He adopted us and made us sons. He redeemed us, purchased us out of bondage with the blood of Jesus. He freed us from the curse of our sins. He has given us wisdom and insight into the mystery of His will. All of the riches of His Son are ours in Him. Our poor little brains can't begin to fathom all that the Father has planned for us to inherit.

That's who you are. Unspeakably rich. Therefore, Paul says, Rejoice. The basis for our joy is our position in Christ. We belong to Him, He belongs to us. We have unspeakable wealth waiting for us in another world. We have the earnest deposit in us that cements the deal. We have the Spirit of God and of Jesus dwelling inside our hearts. We have an intimate love relationship with the Father and the Son through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is our downpayment of the riches that wait for us. Our sins are forgiven, once for all time.

That's the basis on which Paul can give the imperative order to rejoice always. Do an inventory on your joy, your inner joy, inner wellness, inner peace. Is it there? Now ask yourself; What could be taken away from me, by the world, by the state, by your loved ones, by your enemies, by whoever in this world that would hinder your inner joy?

Don't confuse happiness or sadness with inner joy. Happiness comes and goes. Sadness comes and goes. Do you have a deep joy that isn't connected to anything this world can remove. If you don't, perhaps we need to talk.

Our joy is rooted in a relationship with Jesus who will never leave us, and

who promises to rescue us, to call us to Himself, living or sleeping, some day we will hear His voice say; Come Up Here.

Our joy is based in Faith. We believe things yet unseen because this book tells us so, and the Holy Spirit quickens our hearts to life and faith. Through that faith and this revelation comes our hope, not in things of this world, but in the promises of our future wealth in another world. Faith and hope connect us to God intimately who pours out His love in our lives. That love then spills over out of us and onto our brethren.

That triad of faith, hope, and love are the source for this triad of imperatives that Paul gives to his beloved brethren in his final words to them. Faith, Hope, and Love results in a lifestyle of continuous joy, continuous prayer and continuous thanksgiving to our God who showers us with wealth and blessings.

*Vs. 17 pray without ceasing;* The life and health of any relationship is bound up in communication. Two way communication. Friends talk to each other. Often.

Sad story. I was half a mile from the house one day in the Model A talking to Charlie Manes who is also an antique car type. And a dad and a toddler were coming down the sidewalk. A little girl in one of those little plastic coupe things that you make go with your feet when you're 2 1/2 or so. And she never stopped talking to her dad, and her dad never stopped looking at his i-phone.

Love relationships don't survive without two way communication. They just don't. Prayer that is continuous to your Father in heaven pre-supposes the other side of that communication coin. We never cease gazing into this book. He speaks to us in His word, and we speak to Him in continuous prayer.

Two way communication. If your prayer life is cold and dead and lifeless, check the other side of the coin. Are you reading God's word? Are you



listening to good preaching? There's a banquet feast of good preaching at your fingertips these days. Before computers it was mostly good writing. Good books to stimulate your meditations. THE good book, the Bible.

Praying continuously is not so much like Jesus sweating great drops of blood in Gethsemane. We rarely have those moments of intensity anything like that. Sometimes we do. But normally my conversations are more like, sorry for that attitude, Lord. Please cleanse me for those thoughts. Please don't give me what I really deserve. Give me grace that I don't deserve.

Or I'll be listening to the news or reading about the latest developments and I'll literally ask, how long Oh Lord? How long before your kingdom authority to rule and reign in this world begins to happen. It has to be close.

Praying without ceasing is a conversation with the Lord that is never finished. He's always ready to hear what I have to say, what I'm thinking about what is happening, and His word is always present for Him to speak to my heart.

*18 in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

In the last 24 hours, I've breathed in and out 22,000 times. My heart has beat 100,000 times. I took it for granted. I didn't thank God once. His grace to me gave me every breath and will continue to do so until He either calls me home, or He appears in the sky and calls me to Him there.

Our problem, in our fallen state, is that we very quickly not only take every breath of fresh air for granted with thanklessness, very soon we begin to think we are owed those breaths and those heart beats.

In God's original design and intent, every breath was given us in order to bring Him glory. Every heart beat was for His glory. We were made to fellowship with Him and glorify Him, a reflection of His glory.

God's will for you, in Christ Jesus who redeemed us with His poured out blood, is to rejoice in Him always, to communicate continuously with Him, and to thank Him for His grace and provision for us . . . constantly.

How're you doing? I used to worry about my grandmother. She was a grumbler and complainer. She could also be marvelously generous. We all have flaws in our brokenness. But I used to laugh to myself, she's going to get to heaven and say, "This is it???"

Beloved, the more we read the book the more the light comes on as regards what we actually deserve. In Satan's wreckage we are so far from the glory of God. Remember that verse? *For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.* Ro. 3:23

Sin caused us to be waste. Refuse. Rubbish. Sewage. That's what unregenerate people are to God in comparison with His glory and the radiance of His glory that His creation was designed to be.

And we are born in sin. Every one. *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.* Isa. 64:6

Only one person rejoiced always, prayed without ceasing, and thanked His Father in everything. Jesus did it perfectly. We are failures, every one. But Jesus gives us His perfect righteousness by imputation. We are given His perfect life imputed to our account, and our sins are given by imputation to Him to bear full punishment for us.

In my retirement years I've been surprised by God's generosity to us. We have all we need with surplus. We are very blessed. On a scale of difficulty to live out these imperative commands from Paul that would please God and are His will for my life, on a scale from 1 - 10, difficulty interrupting any of these would be a 1 or a 2 perhaps.

What happens if God decides to cleanse His church a little bit with

difficulty, something perhaps like what the Thessalonians were born into. Persecution on all sides, in family, at work, in the marketplace, everywhere, before He returns?

This is supposed to be my Pollyanna glad sermon so I don't want to go all negative. But I am concerned. We do a poor job on these commands in the best of circumstances. Are we ready, if it pleases God, to live joyfully, and prayerfully with continuous thankfulness if the church were to experience serious pressures? If wealth and health flee away?

I've got good news and bad news. We're the richest people in the universe. Wildly rich. That's the good news. Rejoice with thankful hearts telling your Father constantly of your joy and gratitude for all He has showered upon you.

The bad news is those riches, that wealth, are held in trust, for us in the next world. In this one we may be in for trouble. My concern is I keep meeting and talking to christians who live like this is all there is. What if it all vanishes over night. So many christians will be bewildered and sad and perhaps some will suffer shipwreck in their faith.

If joy and inner peace and contentment are bound to your situation in this world, that's a red flag. Christians who own Jesus in their hearts have riches that pass understanding in this world. We own the source of joy and contentment and peace that this world cannot touch.

If you want to see the world through Pollyanna Whittier rose colored glasses that's like the power of positive thinking, everythings going to be OK, "Don't worry, Be happy", you may be disappointed when the birth pangs of judgement come from God to this world just as He outlined and promised.

God's promise isn't for this current world. He's promised judgement for this world. But He has given us something this world cannot take away from us, and that's the reason for our joy. He's promised us that this world

can't take our inheritance away from us. They can kill us, but they can't disturb our wealth and position and blessings forever in the world to come.

That's why we rejoice always. Meanwhile, pray without ceasing, and never stop thanking the Father who has chosen you to thrive and enjoy Him forever both here and in the world to come. Our sins are forgiven. We're His chosen children. Rejoice.