

Brethren, Pray for Us
2 Thessalonians 3:1-2
Halifax: 4 March 2018, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Today we come to chapter 3 of Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians.

- We are only going to take up the first two verses today about praying for ministers.
 - The subject is so important, and there is so much food for thought packed into these two verses,
 - that I think we would miss out on a lot if we don't slow down and consider what is presented to us here.
- So please listen as I read these verses to you, remembering that this is the very word of God...2 Thessalonians 3:1-2.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2: Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, ² and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

The matter is very plain:

I. As a Christian, you are urged to pray for those who preach the word.

A. Paul simply says "pray for us."

1. It is clear from the context that "us" refers to those who preach the word.
 - Paul uses "us" to refer to himself, Timothy, and Silas.
 - In the Bible, a distinction is everywhere found between those who speak and those who hear.
2. You should apply this exhortation to pray to your own situation:
 - Expand it to include all who preach the word today...
 - missionaries,
 - pastors,
 - evangelists.
 - Especially include those who preach the word to you.

B. Praying for those who speak the word is a matter of extreme importance.

1. Just think, our task is to speak for God.
 - a. We must present His word to people and apply it rightly to them.
 - To represent God, we must present Him in a reverent manner, but also as welcoming at the same time, timeless yet relevant, transcendent yet down to earth, incomprehensible and full of mystery yet clear and understandable.
 - We must present Him as a gracious tender Father and a severe judge.
 - There is the need to balance law and gospel, judgment and mercy, conviction and comfort, warning and assurance... always with a danger of emphasising one to the exclusion of the other.
 - We must drive off wolves without mistaking them for sheep and we must embrace sheep without confusing them for wolves.
 - We must stir up the careless at the same time we comfort the weak.

- b. Tremendous blessings come to the Lord's people when we truly represent the Lord.
 - They come to know the Lord, to learn of His ways, to be strengthened in their hope, to be led in the ways that please Him, to find forgiveness in Jesus Christ and sanctification in the Holy Spirit.
- c. But what ruin we can cause when we do not represent God rightly to them.
 - When we are slack, and do not labour in the word—or even worse, when we preach error that leads people to self-righteousness and sin.
 - As Jesus said, such ministers shut up the kingdom for those who are entering and make disciples that are children of hell.
- But how can a minister bear up under such responsibility?
- 2. Even Paul with all his experience did not consider himself sufficient for this!
 - a. He was not ashamed to ask for prayer.
 - He does so here as well as in 1 Thess 5:25 and in many other epistles.
 - He is always saying, “Pray for me,” and “Pray for us.”
 - We read it again and again in his epistles.
 - b. He freely admits that he is insufficient (2 Cor 2:16, 3:5-6)—he feels it.
 - In 2 Cor 2:16, he speaks of the ministry and cries out, “who is sufficient for these things?”
 - And then in 2 Cor 3:5-6, he says: **Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”**
 - c. That is the reason he craves prayer.
 - He can do nothing unless the LORD makes him sufficient.
 - He is unfit for the task without the Lord's help.
 - So am I... so is every minister or the gospel...
- So brethren, “pray for us!”
 - We are worthless apart from Christ.
- 3. We ministers also need prayer because of the many particular temptations we face in the ministry.
 - There is always pressure to change the message because of opposition...but that will lead to a loss of the gospel.
 - There is pressure from both the world and the church.
 - When there is success, there is temptation to become proud.
 - When there is failure, there is temptation to become discouraged—like Jeremiah or even worse like Elijah who wanted to quit.
 - There is a special attack from Satan and his minions.
 - We must bear with criticisms, hostility, inadequacy, fears, indifference in ourselves and others, perplexity, schedule pressures, all kinds of weighty problems among the members and among the greater church.
 - The inability to get to many things that demand our attention.
- Again, who is sufficient for these things?

4. What a difference it makes when there are regular earnest prayers for ministers!
 - It is not just the psychological encouragement of knowing that people are praying for you that matters...
 - It is rather that God truly does answer the prayers of His people.
 - Their prayers truly are effective for their ministers.
 - In praying for them, you are praying for yourself too...
 - and for the whole congregation to whom they are called to: **Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Tim 4:2).**
 - This is what the congregation needs, and you pray for your own good when you pray for your minister.

C. And look at just who is to pray...*brethren*

1. This includes brothers and sisters.
 - The masculine is used in scripture because the Bible represents the unity of the genders—men represent women and children too.
 - There is a proper distinction of roles, not to demean anyone, but to live together in beautiful harmony as those made in the image of God.
 - Men have been so selfish in their role that they have nearly destroyed this unity, but it is a oneness that God instituted at creation.
 - Even in the public assembly, it is the men who are called to raise the voice of prayer and women are to join with them in their hearts—in unity...
 - And in our private prayers, we are all to lift up our requests to God, and among those requests are prayers for God's kingdom and for His ministers of the word and sacrament.

➤ Preaching the word and administering the sacraments is only for those who are called of God...but...
2. Prayer for ministers is something the weakest, lowliest brother or sister can do.
 - Simply cry out to God for your ministers, for the ministers of other churches you know, for famous ministers, for missionaries...
 - If you are on your sick or weak and cannot get out of bed, use the time to pray—
 - It is the duty of all without exception from the least to the greatest.
 - If you have no heart for it, then pray for repentance that you will.
3. Prayer is something you can do that nobody sees
 - Jesus says that those who draw attention to their prayers so as to be seen by men already have their reward,
 - but He reminds you that if you pray in secret, your Father will see it and will reward you openly.
 - He does not mean that you ought never to tell a minister you are praying for him—for that is a great encouragement to him...
 - Paul always tells others that he is praying for them.
 - But just be sure that you really are praying to God, not just to be seen as praying...that in private you are truly crying out earnestly to God.

TRANS> But what ought to be your primary concern in your prayer for ministers?

II. The concern of the prayer for ministers is for the word of the Lord.

- Paul expresses how we are pray for the word itself...not for its own sake as such...
 - But as it is the very voice of God to us—we are praying that His voice would go far and wide and be esteemed for what it is.
- He speaks with lively imagery of two particular things to pray for about the word:
 - A. First, pray that the word would run swiftly.
 - 1. What a lively image this is—the word of God...running!
 - a. We might think of Ezekiel’s river going all over the world.
 - Think of nations cut off that have the word coming to them like a river bringing the life-giving waters to them.
 - Think of the joy of sins forgiven, of the hope of heaven for those who had no hope as the water flows into their nation.
 - Now they have life, they have union with God in Christ.
 - b. We might think of Isaiah’s picture of streams running in the barren desert
 - Seeing the barren wilderness turn green and lush, seeing it blossom.
 - Seeing new life springing up in those walking in the beautiful ways of God,
 - seeing marriage and family, and parenting restored—sacrificial love in place of self-seeking.
 - Farewell to bitterness, strife, anger, indifference, malice, greed;
 - and welcome to love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control.
 - c. We might also think of messengers running through the whole world with a message from the king.
 - We are to pray that they will run with their message.
 - We are to pray that they will get it out to every person.
 - We are to pray that it will be the king’s message and not a false message.
 - A call to flee from His wrath, a declaration of the good news of His grace, a call to repent and serve Him, a call to bow to His prince and look to Him for grace and salvation.
 - Pray that the ministers of the word will get around to everyone—that the water of life will flow to them all.
 - 2. By prayer, you have a role in getting the word to many people
 - a. You are a co-labourer with these labourers.
 - You empower them by your prayers because God answers your prayers.
 - You empower the word that they preach so that it has an impact and gives life to some, and death to others.
 - When you have sowed in tears, you reap with joy.
 - If you have been earnestly praying for sinners to be saved, it is your harvest and that makes you all the more thankful.
 - Not only are you truly a co-labourer by your prayers for ministers...
 - b. You are also a co-labourer by bringing people to hear them and by supporting them with your tithes and offerings.
 - One of the greatest needs in the church is for every member to be involved in reaching the lost—to have a heart for it and an interest in it.

- c. You even have a part in bringing forth more labourers by prayer!
 - Jesus told us to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth labourers.
 - You ask the Lord to send them, and you ask Him to give you the means to support them—even beyond your tithes.
 - Why not take on a second job solely for that purpose—to send missionaries like Tom Van Manaan.
 - God raises them up for the great harvest in answer to your prayers.
 - The world becomes full of the praises of God as they go forth.
 - The nations beat their swords in plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks...they follow the Lamb and He blesses them.

TRANS> Yes indeed,

- Pray that the word would run over the whole earth.
 - That is the first way you pray for the word of the Lord...

B. Second, you are to pray that the word will be glorified.

1. Another lively image!

- If we think of the word as an Olympic runner running swiftly; now we think of it receiving the crown of victory—the glory.
- If we think of the river flowing to the nations, now we think of them saying “Ahhh,” and being refreshed by the lovely life-giving streams!

2. To glorify the word is to esteem it highly, to see its worth and to praise it.

- That it is the very word of God! It is true, it is reliable, it is certain.
- That it is the good news of what Christ has done to receive sinners.
 - This ought to be cherished and exalted—glorified.
- The word gives comfort—true comfort—for it is comfort founded on the very promise of God.
 - Pray that people would esteem it as such.
- This gospel is the power of God to salvation to all who believe.
- This word has power by the Holy Spirit to transform me and to transform nations.
 - It is to be praised and gloried in. Pray that it will be.
- It gives direction of how to live a beautiful life by faith.
 - Now I know how to love my neighbour, how to love my wife and my children and my parents, how to serve and to give to others.
 - Let the nations glory in this word!
- It reveals the glory of God to me in the face of Jesus Christ so that I can know Him—the splendour of His love, the beauty of His holiness, the purity of His justice, the freeness of His mercy and grace, His kindness toward us.
 - Pray that people will see this and will glory in it.

3. Brothers and sisters, as a Christian you want kings and peasants, business men and artists and athletes, all to see the glory of the word.

- Pray that they tremble before it
- Pray that they rejoice in it as the very word of God.
- Pray that they will be awakened to grasp its glory.
- Pray that they will see that here Christ is freely offered for salvation.

C. And notice how the Holy Spirit draws us in to pray all the more eagerly by adding the words “just as it is with you.”

1. Just as you have come to glory in the word, prayer that they will...
 - As you have come to see that it is the very word of God that brings salvation and blessing...
 - Just as you have found a treasure that is more to be desired than gold—yea than much fine gold—and that is sweeter than honey from the honeycomb—to hear the voice of God...
 - Surely now you want others to see what you have seen.
 - You want them to know Jesus and His salvation.
 - Of course you do.
 - The more you see the glory, the more you want them to see the glory.
2. When you have seen the glory of something, you yearn for others to see it too!
 - That sets you to earnest, fervent praying that the word would run swiftly and be glorified.
 - You are a debtor like Paul, to the nations.
 - You have an obligation to give them what you have received.

TRANS> This is the core of your prayer for the ministers of the word...

- That the nations would receive the gospel and preach and glorify it!
 - That it would get to them and that they would honour it when it does!

III. And then there is the specific prayer of verse 2 for the deliverance of ministers from men.

A. For deliverance from *unreasonable and wicked men*.

- For, you see, not all receive the gospel.
1. Those who oppose the gospel are unreasonable men.
 - The word *unreasonable* means out of place—improper...
 - They are like the ones Paul speaks about in 1 Thess 2:15-16 who are contrary to all men, forbidding them to preach the gospel to the Gentiles that they might be saved.
 - Or they are men of corrupt lives, so bent on living in sin that they spew out verbal attacks against the gospel...ludicrous attacks.
 - They take unreasonable actions—like burning servants of the Lord for printing the scriptures in the language of the people.
 - Or they pass blasphemy laws (as in our day) that impose penalties on those who speak the truth—about gender, about sexual immorality, about false religions.
 - They are so deluded that they mock at the belief that God created the world, believing that the world made itself.
 - They laugh at those who preach that there is a judgment day and a heaven and hell, believing that man is the measure of all things...
 - more and more, they believe that man’s feelings are the highest thing—reason once held that place, but it failed...
 - “I think, therefore I am” has become, “I feel, therefore I am.”
 - Today feelings are being guarded as sacred—what I feel trumps facts.

- This is all very unreasonable—and you are to pray against them—that they will not succeed in hindering those who preach the gospel.
2. These men are also called *wicked* men
 - That is because those who oppose the gospel are often cruel and fierce—
 - That is what his word *wicked* denotes in the original...
 - It refers to someone who is aggressive and hostile.
 - They become obsessed with silencing those who preach the truth.
 - They pursue hard after those who speak the truth.
 - Their rage is such that they would crucify Christ if He were here.
 - They lay traps for them and if they can, they will execute them.
- B. Paul explains that these men are like this because they do not have faith.
1. That is the root of the problem.
 - As we saw last week, they may have been baptised and profess to follow Jesus, but they did not receive the love of the truth.
 - And so to punish them, God sent them strong delusion that causes them to believe lies.
 - That is what makes them so unreasonable and so malicious.
 2. When God offers salvation through His Son crucified and you reject it because you do not like it...because you do not want to be reconciled to God...
 - It has serious consequences—it makes you unreasonable and wicked.
 - It caused men to crucify the Lord of glory and it causes them to turn against His followers today.
 - All of this is rooted in not believing the gospel.
 3. Everything goes wrong when you do not have faith—belief in the gospel.
 - You deny major facts, such as that you are sinner accountable to God...
 - And because you deny it and it is true, you cannot bear to hear it.
 - You deny the fact that God is holy and that we can only be saved by Christ.
 - Your whole perspective is distorted.
 - You become unreasonable and aggressive toward the LORD.
- C. What a hindrance such persons can be to God’s ministers.
1. Think of all the ways they seek to hinder the gospel
 - They publish laws against the gospel...
 - They raise up great persecutions against those who believe...
 - They come as false teachers to lead off disciples...or worse, to indoctrinate them in the name of the church.
 - They come into the church and live wicked lives among us, bringing reproach on the gospel.
 - They come in and stir up strife and confusion among God’s people.
 2. You are to pray that ministers would be delivered from such men.
 - The word *deliver* speaks of the way a deity preserves someone from danger—with strength and power.

- But the prayer is not just that ministers would be not face these adversaries, but as Calvin says, that they will be victorious whether by life or by death.
 - The word can advance by life or by death...physical safety is not the issue.
 - The issue is that their ministry is not hindered.
 - That should be their passion and your passion.
 - They are in God's hands and the goal is that they make Christ known—whatever happens to them.
- The thing to pray against the most is that these opponents would be able to shake the faithfulness of those who preach.
 - That is what does the most harm!
 - When ministers adjust the message to avoid trouble... when they cower in fear... when they lose heart and turn to sensuality for comfort... when they become ashamed of the gospel and of the truth...
 - When they grow discouraged and leave the ministry or live so as to disqualify themselves.
 - When they turn from the truth and preach lies to please those who do not love the truth...
 - And believe me, a compromising message will always be welcomed.

Conclusion:

The goal of it all is that Christ in all His glory will be faithfully set forth by the preaching of the gospel...

- That is what you are to pray for.
 - The gospel of Jesus Christ is so precious and so valuable.
 - How many times it has been perverted in the mouth of ministers.
 - Do you see how important it is to pray for them?
- Pray that the word will run swiftly and be glorified before every creature.
 - Some will hate it and some will love it, but you are to pray for those who preach the word—that they will keep on preaching it faithfully and effectively by the grace of God the power of His Spirit.
- If you love the truth of the gospel, this will be your prayer.
 - **Brethren, pray for us!**