

Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. This afternoon we come to respond to that great act of public covenanting that we participated in this morning as we partook of the wedding feast of Christ, the feast of the cross, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. What a blessed time that was to join together as the body of Christ, to sit at His Table, and to partake of that sacramental meal. It is in meditating upon those things that we now come to our text this afternoon. So give your attention now to the infallible Word of our Lord from 1 Thessalonians 5 beginning at verse 16.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Pray

How many of you at some point in your life have wondered what the Lord's will is for you? I'm sure we have all thought this before. This seems to be a question that comes up time after time, and it is one that has endured throughout the ages. There are some people who are constantly seeking after some sort of sign from heaven which makes known to them the will of the Lord. Yet we read in Scriptures that it is the weak and the evil who seeks after a sign. I heard the other day a minister say that we can't try to discern the will of the Lord in this way. He used the example of a man wondering if it is the Lord's will that he buy a \$20,000 car, and in looking for a sign he came across Psalm 68:17 which says, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand." So this had to be a sign that buying the car was the will of the Lord. We may snicker at such an absurd thing, but the sad fact of the matter is that there are many people out there who do things just like that. And even worse, there are some who take up witchcraft to try to discern what the will of the Lord is. They will turn to tarot cards or palm reading or new age mystic practices in hopes that it will show them what is the will of the Lord. That is less sad than those who seek after a sign, because it is not sad, but evil. It is a wicked thing to take counsel from devils, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in order to figure out God's will. I pray that none of you have fallen into any of these practices,

and if you have then I call upon you to stop and to repent. That is not the way to know what the will of the Lord is. But if those means are not what needs to be done, then what is right? Our text this afternoon tell us exactly what the will of the Lord is for you. And following the partaking of that covenant meal this morning, it is even more necessary to make sure that our response to that sacrament is to do the will of the Lord. So we will take up this theme of the will of the Lord by considering the three duties listed in our text: first, rejoice evermore; next, pray without ceasing; and finally, in everything give thanks.

First, the Apostle give the duty in verse 16, “Rejoice evermore.” This is that fruit of the Spirit, joy. It is “an affection of the soul springing from the hope or possession of some suitable good,” as Matthew Poole states. It is a spiritual joy, not some fleeting emotional happiness, but a real true joy, a well-spring which flows forth despite whatever circumstances you may be going through. Calvin says it is a “moderation of spirit, when the mind keeps itself in calmness under adversity, and does not give indulgence to grief.” Too often, our spiritual state is held hostage by our circumstances, leading us down the path of bitterness or sorrow. However, when we fix our gaze upon the wondrous work of the Lord, when we meditate upon how He has redeemed us through the sacrificial offering of His very own body and blood, an overwhelming joy should flood our hearts, sweeping away the roots of bitterness and the seeds of sorrow. Consider for a moment the innumerable blessings that Christ has poured out upon you. Consider the unfailing love that led Him to pay the price for your redemption. In the presence of such boundless grace, no sorrow, however deep, remains unrelieved, and no grief, however intense, can withstand the tide of this spiritual joy. It is as the psalmist says in Psalm 30:5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” Notice that doesn’t mean that you won’t experience sorrow. It means that the sorrow, the weeping, will not endure and will be overcome by the joy of the Lord. Do not let the roller coaster of life’s trials to determine your spiritual state. Instead, let the profound joy of the Spirit well up

within you, a joy rooted in the hope and possession of your glorious inheritance in Christ. In this enduring joy, you find strength, resilience, and an unshakable anchor for your souls, for it is the joy that comes not from the world but from the very heart of God Himself.

And it is the joy that comes from the very heart of God Himself. It is not the joy of friends or family or possessions or anything else in this world that will be what fills you, but the joy of the Lord. It is that great benediction of Romans 15:13 “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” It comes to you through the power of the Holy Ghost. And this joy ought to overflow within you, pouring forth from you so as to manifest itself in praise for the Lord. Think of Miriam who, after seeing the great work of redemption in Jehovah delivering the people of God out of the land of Egypt, the joy of the Lord burst forth from her in an act of praise and rejoicing. Or think of Mary who, upon hearing the good news that she would carry our Savior and bring Him into this world, could not help but rejoice in God and proclaim forth the magnificat. Or think of Simeon who, after waiting his whole life for the coming Messiah, rejoiced when his eyes were cast upon Christ Jesus. How can you experience all the blessings of the Lord, all of the wonderful things He has done for you, the salvation which He has given you in His Son, and not burst forth with rejoicing? Hear the words of the prophet in Isaiah 61:10, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” If you have come unto the wedding and partaken of the feast of fat things, if you have been given the wedding garment and put on Christ, then the only response there is for you is to rejoice.

And it is important to note the word “evermore.” This means that every aspect of your lives should be full of rejoicing in the Lord.

This rejoicing is not a fleeting emotion, nor will it fade with time; it endures for all time. As Matthew Henry states, "A religious life is a pleasant life; it is a life of constant joy." This joy, rooted in your relationship with Jehovah, should permeate every facet of your existence. If you are in Christ, your journey in this Christian life does not end when you pass from this earthly realm into the next. Instead, you enter into an everlasting life, an existence marked by eternal communion with the Lord. And so, your duty to rejoice in the Lord is not a temporary obligation but an everlasting one. The command to "rejoice evermore" serves as spiritual training, shaping your soul for the glorious eternity that awaits you, where your sole purpose will be to worship, glorify, and praise your God and King. In this eternal blessedness, your joy will find its ultimate fulfillment as you bask in the radiance of God's presence. The trials and tribulations that once weighed upon your heart will fade into insignificance in the light of His glory. So let this rejoicing evermore be your anchor in the here and now, as a foretaste of the eternal bliss that awaits you in the divine embrace of your Savior. Let it guide your steps, uplift your spirit, and draw you ever closer to the source of all joy, the Lord Himself.

Added to the command to rejoice evermore is the next duty, "Pray without ceasing." But what exactly does it mean to pray without ceasing? Does this mean that we should do nothing else other than to pray? Does it mean that we should abandon our daily responsibilities, forsake our jobs, homes, and retreat to the mountains to live as hermits, dedicating every moment to prayer, as some did during the Middle Ages? They viewed this verse as a command to leave everything behind and seclude themselves so that they could devote themselves to a monastic life of prayer. But that is not what the Apostle is commanding here. To do something like that would actually be contrary to the entire scope of Scripture's teaching that we are to be salt and light in this world. Salt can never season something that it never touches. Light cannot illuminate something when it is hidden away. Salt seasons and preserves what it comes into contact with, and light illuminates the darkness where

it shines. We must understand this duty to pray without ceasing in light of the fact that Christ Jesus says in His high-priestly prayer in John 17:18, “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” Your prayers are most effective when you engage with the world, touching the lives of those around you. Retreating into isolation would hinder your ability to fulfill our role as ambassadors of Christ’s love and truth. You have been sent into the world by your Savior, which means that this cannot be commanding a seclusion from the world so that you can live a life of never-ending prayer.

So, what does it mean to pray without ceasing? It is a call to cultivate a continuous attitude of communion with God throughout your daily lives. It is a call to seek His unwavering guidance, steadfast strength, and profound wisdom in every facet of your existence—whether toiling in the workplace, nurturing in the home, or engaging within the broader community. It means recognizing that prayer isn’t confined to a specific time and place; it is an ongoing conversation with your Heavenly Father, a lifeline as you navigate both the challenges and joys of this life. There is always going to be something that comes up during your day, whether something good or something bad. Yet, it is precisely within these moments, whether they bring smiles or tears, that the call to pray without ceasing gets put into action. Each of these events is an opportunity for unceasing prayer. It is an invitation to maintain that connection with your Creator, turning your hearts and minds to Him in all things. Matthew Poole states that this command is “to preserve a heart disposed to pray at all times, and to mingle ejaculatory prayers with the several actions of our lives: our wants are continual, and God will be acknowledged in all our supplies, and therefore we ought to pray continually.” You must recognize the need for God’s constant presence in your lives. Pray without ceasing, not because God requires constant petitions, but because you continually recognize your dependence on Him.

And this praying without ceasing ought to be done privately, not as a public spectacle. Christ Jesus says in Matthew 5:5-6, “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” You have a duty to make this a regular part of your day, to enter into your prayer closet and to bring your petitions before your Heavenly Father. I am going to say something that may hurt, but it needs to be said. If you are not going before the Lord in daily prayer then you need to seriously examine your spiritual state. How can you be in close communion with God if you are not utilizing the means by which that communion comes about? Pastor Gavin Beers puts it very bluntly, but I believe he is right when he says, “A prayerless person is a graceless person.” Friends, if you are not praying without ceasing, if you are not a people of prayer, then it should be a cause of concern for you. But praying without ceasing does not just encompass private secret prayer, but includes corporate prayer as well. We read of the early church in Acts 2:42, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” One very easy way of doing this is not forsaking to join the midweek prayer meeting. The Lord Jesus Christ proclaims that His house will be known as a house of prayer. Are you a member of His house? If so, are you contributing to making His house a house of prayer? Dear saints, this is your Christian duty; this is the will of God for you, that you pray without ceasing.

And lastly, the duty which ties all of this together, “In every thing give thanks.” You are to give thanks to the Lord in everything that happens, in every blessing you receive, in every circumstance of life. Why? Because everything that you have been given has been given unto you by His gracious and loving hand for your growth and benefit. Think of how much He has given for you. We just partook

of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in which we saw very clearly the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for the purchasing of your salvation. Brothers and sisters, Jehovah literally gave up His very own life for you. He has given you this free gift of salvation, and you have received it with gladness. What else can you do but express your thankfulness unto the Lord? Every one of us who have children would scold our children if they received a gift from someone and yet did not express their thanks for it. Yet, when we have received the greatest gift that has ever been given, why do we think it is okay to continue on with life not expressing our thanks to the Lord? This command to give thanks to the Lord is the constant refrain of Scripture. Psalm 100:4, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name." Psalm 107:1, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." Ephesians 5:18-20, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Hebrews 13:15, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." There is no denying that the giving thanks to the Lord in all things is required of you as one who is dependent upon Him for all things.

Friends, the Gospel must produce gratitude within you. You have received the greatest of all gifts from the greatest of all givers, and that must produce the greatest amount of gratitude. The very fact that you woke up today, the very fact that you have breath in your lungs is reason enough for you to express your sincere thanks unto God. Even these smallest of mercies, those which we so often forget about, must be remembered and thanks must be given for them. But the Lord has not just given you the smallest of mercies, but in Christ Jesus you have been given the greatest of mercies. Devote yourself to a life of thanksgiving to the Lord for the wondrous works He has done. But you may say to yourself, what

about the bad times that we go through? What about the times of turmoil or sorrow that seem to plague this life that is so marred by sin and misery? The answer is to give thanks then as well. The command is not give thanks when things are going well and everything seems to be all sunshine and rainbows. No, the command is in every thing give thanks. Henry writes, "It is never so bad with us but it might be worse. If we have ever so much occasion to make our humble complaints to God, we never can have any reason to complain of God, and have always much reason to praise and give thanks: the apostle says, This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us, that we give thanks, seeing God is reconciled to us in Christ Jesus; in him, through him, and for his sake, he allows us to rejoice evermore, and appoints us in every thing to give thanks. It is pleasing to God." Friends, even in the most difficult times of this life Jehovah is still showering you with mercy and you have a duty to respond with sincere thanks for His kindness to you.

Friends, when someone looks at your life do they see someone who lives a life of thanksgiving and gratitude for what the Lord has done, or do they see someone who is constantly grumbling and complaining? That was the sin of our forefathers after they had left Egypt, and the Lord almost destroyed them for it. We see this in Numbers 14:27, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me." Do not be like those ancient people of God who neglected to see the great and bountiful blessings which He had poured out upon them. Beloved, this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, to be thankful in everything. This is not optional. It's not something that you can decide whether or not you want to do it. It is a command. It is a way in which we see the fulfillment of what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And for those of you who may feel that this is an immense burden to be placed upon you, that you could never do this perfectly, let me comfort you by saying you are right. You can never do this perfectly, but thanks be to God that you have been united to the one who has

done it perfectly. It is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. The act of being thankful in everything is something which is only found in Christ Jesus, because He is the one who has done this perfectly for you. Take refuge in that, not as an excuse to not be thankful in your own life, but as a comfort that even in the midst of failing, you are found perfect in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, these things are given to you as perpetual duties in this Christian life. Meditating upon and thinking deeply on the sign and seal of the covenant of grace found in the Supper ought to bring forth a recommitment to fulfill these duties in Christ Jesus. Rejoice evermore. Praise your God and King for the mighty things He has done and because He is worthy of all your praise. Find your joy in Him, a lasting joy which will never fade nor falter, because it is rooted in the unchangeable love of God. Pray without ceasing. Pray and not grow faint. Pray without weariness. Continue in constant prayer until you reach that world where prayer is swallowed up in praise and you dwell in the presence of the Almighty for all eternity. And in every thing give thanks. Let your life be one marked by thanksgiving unto the Lord. Let all these things mingle and meld together, filling you up to the point of bursting, and let it all flow forth from you in a life of true and unwavering devoting unto the Lord, for this is God will for you.