**Prayer of petition** 4/2/24dkm

Read: John 17, 2Thessalonians 1

Text: 2Thessalonians 1:11-12

Psalms: 96:1-9, 89:11-18, 113, 118:19-26, 72old

‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever’. These words are the answer to the first question of the Shorter Catechism. They are not words of Scripture but are based on Scripture, and are most profound. We, as human beings made by God, are made to enjoy life, or more correctly, to enjoy God. This we do through worship, worship in a gathering of his people and worship in our daily life. We worship God in spirit and in truth, and according to his commands. Our whole life is to be focussed on God and his glory.

But what does it mean to glorify God, or how do we glorify God? The apostle Paul has already spoken about the glory to be revealed when Jesus comes again; he will come in heavenly glory or splendour and we will see him as he is, or in his glory. Moreover, he will be ‘glorified in his saints’ on that day (1:10). We who believe will be changed and given new bodies so as to be like him (1John 3:2). This is the hope with which the apostle comforted the believers in Thessalonica. Glory, however, also refers to how we live in this world, not just to the revelation of Jesus Christ on the last day. We will look at this shortly.

We are still in the first chapter of Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonian church. He began this letter giving thanks to God for the growing faith and love seen in these new believers, despite the affliction and persecutions they were facing (1:3, 4). In the closing two verses of this chapter we find a prayer of petition. We find Paul telling the church, ‘We are praying for you always’ (1:11). If he prayed for them every time he prayed it would have been at least daily, and probably two or three times a day.

Do you have things you pray for every day, or do you get a bit tired of praying for things over and over again? Maybe you say you don’t want to bother God, but God is never bothered by your prayers if they come from a sincere and devoted heart. He will answer in his time if your prayers are according to his will. Pauls’ prayer of petition for the Thessalonians includes three things: ‘God count you worthy of his calling’, ‘God fulfil his good purpose in you’, and that, ‘Jesus be glorified in you, and you in him’.

**1. God count you worthy of his calling**

A panel of judges was recently asked to choose an Australian citizen worthy of the title ‘Australian of the year’. Actually, they have to come up with someone worthy or not- which they have done too often! Like all human institutions, they only judge on outward appearances. They are given long resumes, and interview the nominees, I think. But they cannot see into a person’s heart to see if they really love this country or not.

When the Lord comes to choosing a worthy recipient, we can be sure he knows everything about us, even the secrets we keep in our heart. And the truth is, none of us are worthy to receive anything from the Lord; ‘For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom 3:23). We can be great scientists, dedicated environmentalists, excel on the sporting field, or even wonderful humanitarians, but with God none of this counts. We can even be hard working members of the church but not be worthy before God. Our worthiness comes through God’s grace. We read here, ‘worthy of his calling’ (1:11). Unless you are called by God you are not in the running. Sure, we must make our calling and election sure by ongoing works of faith and acts of love, but it is God who predestined us, called us, justified us, and glorified us (Rom 8:30).

Paul spoke of being ‘counted worthy of the kingdom of God’ back in verse 5. Jesus is king of this kingdom and he calls and chooses who will be in his kingdom. When he calls, as he does in the gospel you are hearing, and you respond by repenting of your sin and believing in Jesus as your saviour and Lord, you will be welcomed into his kingdom, the kingdom of grace and love in Jesus Christ. We continue in this kingdom by the grace of God. We call this sanctification or growing in holiness.

The believers in Thessalonica were growing in faith and love, or were being ‘sanctified’. Jesus prayed for his disciples to be sanctified by God’s truth: ‘Your word is truth’ (John 17:7). Paul does not use the word ‘sanctification’ here, but he does talk of growth and ‘works of faith with power’ (1:11). It is interesting that in Romans 8:30, Paul moves straight from justification to glorification; we will come to the matter of glorification shortly.

Jesus called you to be holy, to be holy as he is holy, holy in all your conduct (1Peter 1:15, 16). Holy conduct is seen in Jesus, who kept all the commandments perfectly and obeyed the will of his heavenly Father perfectly. We have not done this and cannot do this, but it must be our desire and aim. And we must realise that we need God’s help or ‘power’ even to begin. We must want and choose to grow in faith and love, but must call upon the Lord for help. ‘Even when we are committing ourselves to do what is good, we need God’s power to actually do it’.

**2. God fulfil his good purpose in you**

Paul’s second petition is not easy to translate, but it is along the lines of the first. You will notice that our NKJ translation inserts ‘His’ before ‘goodness’ but it is literally, ‘resolve of goodness’; NIV has ‘every good purpose of yours’. Hendriksen recognises that the word ‘*eudokia*’ often refers to God’s good pleasure, but says that here Paul has in mind the believers resolve, and the believers good work or ‘work of faith’- the two parts of this petition. ‘God initiates every good purpose and every act prompted by faith; Paul prays accordingly that he will bring them to fulfilment’. I hope this is not too confusing! It is true that God has, ‘the good pleasure of his will’ (Eph 1:5), and our task or resolve is to find out or ‘prove’ what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2).

Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians is that they will know and will do the will of God, or rather that their desire or ‘good pleasure’ would conform to the desire or good pleasure of God (Eph 1:9). In Ephesians 1:12 Paul goes on to say, ‘to the praise of His glory’. We are called by God and must be living lives worthy of this high calling, living as children of the King. This means finding out the will of God, his good, pleasing, and perfect will for us. We can only do this in his strength or with his power. You will see God fulfilling your desires when your desires align with his desires for you, and for his glory.

The second part of this petition refers to ‘the work of faith with power’ (1:11). God’s power covers all this petition, and even the first petition. All who believe are given the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of power by which we fight the world, the flesh, and the devil, and at the same time embrace and love the Lord, and his good, pleasing and perfect will for us. If by grace through faith you have believed, are you going on in the Lord, doing works prompted by faith, and empowered by the Spirit of God? Remember, faith without works is dead (James 2:20). Paul speaks of faith working. This happens as we draw nearer God, knowing him and his will for us more and more. As we walk in step with the Lord, and imitate his perfect Son, we will bring glory to God each and every day.

**3. Jesus be glorified in you, and you in him**

Paul’s last petition is, ‘That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be gloried in you, and you in Him’ (1:12). The name of a person was more significant in ancient times than it is in our society, although most parents are careful in naming their child. Jesus was named by his heavenly Father of course. With this name came the title ‘Messiah’ or ‘Christ’, and being the Son of God, he is Lord. The last sentence of verse 12 is only a proof text for Jesus being God if the word ‘the’ is omitted.

A person’s name was so closely associated with that person that to dishonour their name was highly offensive. Still today, any insult directed at the king of Thailand attracts a prison term of 15 years! Just recently a man was given a 50yr sentence for multiple ‘insulting words’ on social media. Our duty, and indeed our desire as followers of Jesus, is to bring honour to the name of Jesus at all times. People around us do not see God, or see Jesus, even though he is revealed in the pages of the Bible. But they see us, and the question for us is, ‘Do they see Jesus in us?’ Too many Christians bring dishonour rather than honour to the name of Jesus because of what they do and say; or don’t do and don’t say!

Paul’s prayer is that these suffering believers in Thessalonica bring glory to the name of Jesus by being like Jesus. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a glorious gospel, and the cross of Jesus reveals his glorious grace. In preaching the gospel we bring glory to the name of Jesus. Let us never be ashamed of this gospel, even if we end up suffering because of this name (Rom 1:16).

Worshipping Jesus in spirit and truth brings glory to his holy name, so let us not give up meeting together for worship. And let our worship be focussed on Jesus, not on ourselves, or on food and fellowship, as important as these are. Paul discouraged tongue-speaking in church because unbelievers did not hear the gospel in this way (1Cor 14:23). When Jesus prayed, he spoke of being glorified in his disciples and of them being one (John 17:10, 22). Jesus was sent by the Father and obeyed his Father; this was his witness to the world. The church is to show the same obedience and oneness with God, and with one another, as it witnesses the grace and power of God to the world; Jesus glorified in us, and we in him, both individually and in his church.

The word ‘glory’ refers to the outward appearance of Jesus, as on the mount of transfiguration where ‘they saw his glory’ (Luke 9:32), and when he ‘comes again on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory’ (Mat 24:30), but it also refers to how we live as his people. How is Jesus glorified in us even now? Is it by works of faith or the outworking’s of our God-given faith. We give glory to Jesus when we gather to praise his holy name, when we give thanks to him for all his blessings upon our lives. We bring him glory when we are united in love towards him and towards one another, and we glorify his name when we are prepared to suffer shame or persecution for his name, as the people in Thessalonica were doing. They did so because of the grace and power of God, and we do so in the same way, knowing the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ today and every day. We are waiting for him to come again, when we will share is his heavenly glory with new and glorified bodies. Until then, ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever’.