

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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People Of The Kingdom

PART

11

TITLE

Practicing His Presence

SCRIPTURE

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



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Providence, grace, and peace. It's good to be with you. You are the 11 o'clock, I expect a little more out of you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." So short we can say it twice. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Gracious God and Father, do work, show off Your glory, show off the beauty of Your Son by Your powerful Spirit, and do it for the sake of Your name. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I love the story of the little kindergartner who was asked by his teacher what he was drawing. Without pausing, he looked up at her and he said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The teacher looked down and said, "Well, sweetie, nobody knows what God looks like." He, with a straight face, looked back up at her and said, "Well, after I'm finished here, they will."

This beautifully captures both the privilege and the task that kingdom people have, and that is to give people a glimpse of what God looks like, what God is like, and what His kingdom is like. By the power of His spirit, we live in such a way that our practices demonstrate to the world that He is present, He is present. At the first glance of our text this morning, it doesn't seem like much is here. In fact, I struggled with it a little bit as I was studying it. I mean, on the surface it just seems like it's three little casual exhalations, rejoice, pray, give thanks. Almost seems too small for a whole sermon. In fact, as I looked, most people deal with this as part of the broader context. So I figured if I was going to do justice to this text, we have to really work this baby in a way that allows us to understand the significance that these three little imperatives play in their context. First, the context. The context lets us know that this is a corporate exhortation. In other words, this is what we are to do together. This is something that God has ordained for His kingdom people as a whole. Yes, it applies to individual Christians, but in the context, it's talking about how we are together. After all, this starts back in five verse 12 where it starts talking about how we're relating to church leaders. We say, "Okay, we're in church. It's about us and our church leaders." That was verse 12. In verse 13 there's a call to fellowship or have peace with one another. So there's the leadership, and then there's something about how we fellowship with one another, having peace.

And then we are kind of urged to help people who are on the road of their fellowship. And so, we're looking and we're saying, "Oh, we got to help various kinds of people in the corporate gathering." That's the context. And he's going to go on to talk about using gifts and not quenching the spirit when he shows up through the various gifts. The context is that this is corporate. Well, but this is also not about just rejoicing and praying and thanksgiving, but this is about these things being characteristic. They're not just things that you do every now and then, these things are how you are characteristically. In other words, everyone rejoices if the news is good enough. Most people pray if the news is bad enough. And everyone, if they have a little bit of courtesy, will say thank you if the service is pleasing enough.

But the key here that takes it from just what is common to what is Christian is these words that come after all the imperatives: always, without ceasing, and in every circumstance. If I can get nerdy, these are in what

we call the emphatic position. It's as though in the original these things are first. Always rejoice, unceasingly pray. In all circumstance, give thanks. Now, that's a whole other ballgame.

Lastly, the context says that conflict is assumed, that these imperatives, these commands to rejoice, these commands to pray, these commands to give thanks in all circumstances assumes that you'll really need this in the midst of conflict. The Thessalonians are receiving this letter. Chapter one, verse six tells us that they had already come to Christ amid much affliction. This is the place that tells you, "Don't worry because Christ is coming back and He's going to avenge you. This is the thing that Christ is going to come back and there's hope for people who pass on." I mean, this is the text that's encouraging believers in the midst of a lot of conflict.

Even the verse right before this talks about, "Don't repay people who do you wrong back." No backsies. Don't get back. Why? Because in the context, this is about conflict. So what we're going to do is we're going to look at this text in light of the fact that it's corporate. It's what we should be. It should mark who we are. It's about our character. It should be what we do not if things are right but regardless of what happens, and this is going to assume conflict. We do these even though times are hard.

Lastly, it is a calling, it is a calling for people who are in Christ Jesus. Verse 18 is going to conclude with, "For this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." In other words, this is what God wants from His kingdom people. Why? Because this is a worship passage. We're going to look at these in the context of our worship. What is worship? It's what we do collectively to state something about our King and His worthiness. Also, this is about our witness. He anticipates that when people see how we respond to the circumstances, how we are the people who rejoice, we are the people who are thankful, and we are the people who pray regardless of the circumstances that that's going to give us some legs to our witness, legs to our witness.

So, God prescribes these graces, God produces these graces because God wants His church to be marked by these graces. In other words, these practices, they prove that God is present, God is present. So let's look at it. "Rejoice in the Lord in all seasons." That's how we've filled out verse 16, which just says, "Rejoice always," some texts, "Rejoice evermore." Rejoice in the Lord in all seasons. We've supplied in the Lord, because the only way you're going to rejoice in all seasons or always is if you have something that can sustain you in all circumstances and all seasons. That's the Lord.

Perhaps you've heard that joy is not like happiness because happiness is predicated on happenings, and that's true. But you know that joy in the Bible is a happiness. It is a internal happiness, but you are right, it's not based on circumstances but it's based on certainties. And the only thing that's certain is God and His character, His goodness, and the fact that He only can do good. In other words, joy is the inner happiness and pleasure that we possess by the grace of God based not on the circumstances, but on the certainties of who God is.

But the text doesn't say be joyful, though that's assumed, the text says rejoice. Joy is what you possess. To rejoice is what you express. What the text is basically saying is, "Express that you have an internal happiness in our God who is good and can only do good." So the text, you can say, begins assuming the joy we possess is provided by the Lord. This joy that produces rejoicing is provided by the Lord. Joy is a part of the fruit of the spirit. Galatians 5 talks about the evidences that the Spirit is resident in you is He produces characters that come from the Spirit. Joy is one of them. Love, joy, peace, patience. Joy is one of them. It gives evidence that God is resident in you.

Christian joy is the joy you get from Jesus Himself, John 15:11, "These things I've spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Jesus says, "I have a joy. I have a joy. It's a joy that you see expressed in all seasons, always." He says, "And I want to give that joy to you." This is on a night where He's telling them, "I'm about to leave." Their faces are sort of downcast because they're sad that Jesus is leaving, and He starts talking about, "I've said these things to you so that the joy I have even at the threshold of the cross will be in you." This is Jesus with a joy. He produces a joy and a rejoicing.

The joy that we express or the rejoicing that we express is produced by the Lord. So joy is provided by Jesus, and it's also prompted or produced or brought out of us by Jesus. This is the goodness and the glory and the joy that Jesus Himself produces in us. He knows how to get the joy that's in you to come out in the form of rejoicing. I mean, when Jesus shows up, joy marks the spot. That's what happens. Matter of fact, Matthew 13:44, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field."

Oh, Jesus says the kingdom is like this, the kingdom is like a person who out of joy says, "I leave my inferior happiness is for this superior joy." That's what the kingdom is like. That's what the kingdom is like. Later on, Matthew 25 says that Jesus is going to call us in at the end and He'll say to some, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter the joy of your master." That you're headed for joy. In the meantime, He's given you joy. And what we ought to do is to express that joy. He brings joy, He calls His joy, and He provides an opportunity for us to express that joy. This is the Christian life. This is what happens when you have Jesus. He deposits something in us that allows us to express an internal happiness in Him regardless of what's going on around us. It's the atmosphere of Christians when they come in contact with Jesus. If you're not in Jesus, perhaps all you have are circumstances which cause you to go up or down. When you have Jesus, you have the ability, access to something that allows you to express joy no matter what's going on.

You say, "Show it to me." Well, I'll leverage other places in the scriptures. How about Acts 2? When the church was birthed, the scene was a party it seemed like. In fact, they blamed it on the alcohol. They said, "Hey, it seems like y'all are on some new wine." He says, "No, we are just lit because the Spirit of God came and deposited something in us." This is what Joel talked about, that he was going to pour out his spirit. Galatians 5, "With the spirits pouring out comes joy, internal happiness in what is certain, God and His character."

Then it says they didn't just leave it at Pentecost, they went home and it started becoming the way of the church. Acts 2, "Day by day attending the temple together, breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with what? Glad and generous hearts." It's a atmosphere of joy. Chapter three, a man that was lame got his legs, and it says he got up and he began rejoicing as he went into the temple. You say, "Uh-huh, it was a good thing that brought his rejoicing." Okay, chapter five, because based on that miracle, the apostles were put in prison or jail. And it says here that they were beat for preaching Jesus, and they went out rejoicing. They were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His name.

The text wants to let you know that sometimes you get something that makes you want to rejoice. Other times you get something you wish you didn't get, but you're still able to rejoice. No, keep going. Acts 8, the Bible says a man named Philip went to Samaria and the gospel caught wreck, and the Bible says that revival broke out. And it says about that, "So there was much joy in that city." When Jesus shows up and when Jesus deposits Himself, joy marks the spot. Oh, the text moves you right to a Ethiopian eunuch. The Ethiopian eunuch gets baptized after hearing the gospel, just like we saw today. And the text says, "When he came up out of the water, Philip was gone." It was almost like, "You're going to leave me high and dry?" That's a joke. But the text says, "And seeing Philip know more, he went on his way rejoicing." Okay, so you were there, I was rejoicing. And then you were gone, I'm still rejoicing. It's what Jesus does. Skip over to Acts 16. We won't talk about the fact that they were singing hymns in prison, on lockdown, Nash Correctional Facility singing hymns. But also, when they miraculously got sprung, it says that the guard wanted to commit suicide because he thought he was in trouble. Paul comes, gives him the gospel, tells him, "Don't kill yourself, God is with you." Brings him, preaches the gospel. Him and his house, they get saved. And what does the text say? It says that they rejoiced, him and his household, because he had believed in God. Rejoiced because of belief in God.

There's joy everywhere when Jesus shows up. It's something He provides, and then it's something He pulls out of us in the form of rejoicing no matter what the circumstances. Paul would write a letter to the Philippians and keep repeating this theme, telling them, "Rejoice I say. And again I say rejoice." "Rejoice in the Lord always," the Psalmist would chime in. "Hey, I said it first rejoice in the Lord and forget not any of His benefits." We're talking about rejoicing. Peter said, "I wrote a letter too, it's called 1 Peter. I told them, 'I know you haven't seen Jesus, but you still love Him and you rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.'" John said, "Move over. I wrote a letter too, it's called 1 John. I told them, 'I write these things so that our joy may be complete.'" What am I saying? I'm saying that when Paul says to Thessalonians, "Rejoice always," what he is saying is, "Do what Christians do regardless of what comes their way. Give expression to the happiness that they have with their Lord who's faithful and certain whatever the circumstance.

Here's a caveat, this is not just kicks and giggles, this is not walking around with smiley faces and emojis. Text says Jesus wept. There will be tears for the believer. The text calls Jesus a man of sorrows. There will be sorrow in this life. One of the most impactful messages I ever heard at my chapel in Southeastern was a man who reminded me that nowhere in the scriptures does it say Jesus laughed. But it does say that Jesus wept.

But Jesus and joy go together, and He provides something that can show up always.

Rejoicing in all seasons, showcase our worship, and enhance our witness. Rejoicing in all seasons. To rejoice because you hit the lottery is one thing. To rejoice because you just went bankrupt is another thing. To rejoice in the midst of good is one thing. To rejoice in the midst of all is another thing. When you rejoice in all seasons, you showcase our worship and our witness. That's why we say, "Rejoice in the Lord."

Our worship, let's look at that. Jesus brings joy. Jesus gives joy. Jesus is better than all inferior joys. This is why Habakkuk says, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation." See, all negatives at first, but God is the positive. It's worship when in spite of the negatives you still proclaim the sufficiency and the goodness of the positive, the Lord.

I thought about Elkanah, Hannah's husband, the father of Samuel, Samuel. She was depressed. She was disappointed because she couldn't have a child. Elkanah said, "Wait, why are you crying? Why haven't you eaten? Am I not more to you than 10 sons?" Now just imagine, she probably was there like, "No, you didn't." But that's a good question. What's more to you than 10 sons? The Lord Jesus said this, "Unless you love me more than mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, even self, you can't be what I'm talking about here, my disciple."

So here's the application, rejoice always. When it's good and when it's bad, I rejoice. When he gives and when he takes away, I rejoice. When I abase, when I abound, I rejoice. That's worship. But it also gives us witness. It helps us in our witness. The Christian church has always been both missional and attractional. We have a going, and we have a glowing nature to us. We have a going and a glowing nature to us. In other words, why would people want what we have if we look like we don't want what we have? There's something about when you come in and see people delighting in Christ that makes you want to delight in Christ.

I speak to a lot of people, and sometimes it looks like they don't like this much. And so, we wonder why the world doesn't want it. Our witness, when we rejoice. This is why in Philippians it says, "Do all things without grumbling or complaining. You're a light in this crooked generation." Rejoicing enhances our witness. Why? Because we not only declare Him to be worthy, worship, we also get to show them that He's welcomed us. We're welcomed. Unceasing rejoicing happens when you say, "He's worthy," and you get to proclaim, "He's welcomed us."

I like what one preacher says, "Oh, what a comfort this is, when the comforter Himself commands us to rejoice. God was one to say repent, not rejoice, but here God commanded to rejoice. Therefore, you must understand to whom He speaketh." I even like the way he talks. "In the Psalms it has said, 'Let the saints be glad, not let the wicked be glad. And in Isaiah God sayeth, 'Comfort ye my people,' not comfort my enemies.

He would have us holy as He is holy. Would have us joyful as He is joyful. He who would have us do His will on earth as angels do it in heaven would have us rejoice on earth as angels rejoice in heaven. He who have ordained us to the kingdom of saints would have us rejoice that we have such a kingdom to receive. Therefore, Christ sayeth to His disciples, 'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Rejoice in the Lord in all seasons. Why? Because He's worthy and He's welcomed us. Oh, the one who was worthy welcomes those who are not worthy. That's a good thing. I like what Spurgeon told some preachers about the role of the face in preaching. Spurgeon said, "When you speak of heaven, let your face light up. Let it be irradiated with a heavenly gleam. Let your eyes shine with reflected glory." What he was saying is, "Your face says it all. Your countenance says it all. Your posture says it all. If you're showing off heaven, if you're showing off a king, if you're showing off His kingdom, it should be written all over your external disposition." He says, "But when you speak of hell, well, then your ordinary face will do."

Let our ordinary face be one of rejoicing because it's based not on the circumstances, but on God who is certain. But not only that, he says pray to the Lord without ceasing, verse 17. Pray continually. The church is not only to be a praising church but also a praying church. This too is a corporate command. We should pray together. It should mark us. Pray unceasingly. We don't just pray at dinner times. We don't just pray, try to get it out the way, as transition into the next thing so nobody will look up while we reorganize the stage. We don't just pray at meals. We don't just pray to kick things off. "Let your hearts, one person said, "be magnetized with prayer so that if the finger of duty turns it away from the immediate act, there may still be the longing desire to be acted upon the first possible moment. As perfume lies in flowers even when they do not shed their fragrance, so let prayer lie in your hearts."

Some people really know how to say it, don't they? It's not the moving of our lips, but it is the elevation of our heart. It's been sometimes said, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." Now, you might have heard that. Well, we don't agree with that. The gospel requires words if you want to preach it. That's what it means. And I know what people mean. They mean, "Well, you got to let your life do to talking." Yes, but the Bible says also you got to let your mouth do to talking. But this could be said about prayer because sometimes words are not able to verbalize it, but the heart is still in conversation with God.

First of all, we pray out of dependence. We pray out of delight. And we pray in submission to the divine. First, look, prayer is an act of dependence. Unceasing prayer is this persistent call on God out of dependence. We were taught to pray to our Father. In their context, a father was viewed as a provider, that's one of his main job descriptions, the father provides. So we are told to pray to our Father. Later on, it was rebuked, He says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, with prayer and thanksgiving, make your request known." Again, don't worry, you got a father. You got someone who knows you're dependent on Him. The Lord Jesus says, "Come on, man, look at the birds, you know I got you." We come to Him as dependents. We know that.

But we don't come just as dependents, we come out of a delight. We come out of a light. Prayer is an expres-

sion of delight. Only sweet communion unceasingly with God can lead to unceasing communication with God. Yes, this is why Mark 7 He says, "Isaiah was right. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." He says, "I don't just want your words, I want your heart. I want your heart."

First thing my wife did was try to teach our kids, okay, there's prayer to God, and there's a poem to God. And this is no shot because if you teach your kids to pray, "God is good. God is great. Let us thank Him for our plate," okay, you're at least getting them into the form. I got you. But, so they know, to rattle up some words upward is not the same as engaging in thoughtful conversation with God, that's what prayer is, out of, again, a dependence on Him but also a delight in Him. Romans 8 says that the Spirit comes in to give us the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, "Abba. Abba." Abba is the way to talk about God intimately. I don't want my kids coming up to me saying, "Hey, William." I want them to say, "Pop. Dad. Daddy." Again, it's out of a delight, a relational delight.

But then it's also, prayer is in submission to the divine will. The divine. I like what Presbyterian minister Albert Martin says, "Prayer must be regulated by the revealed will of God and offered in submission to the secret will of God." I love that. "Prayer must be regulated by the revealed will of God, but then it also should be submitted to the secret will of God." For John, he says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us regulated by the revealed will of God."

We know that He hears us in whatever we ask. We know that we have the request that we have asked of Him. He says, "If you pray regulated by the revealed will, that's a good thing. But there's also that secret will." John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask what you wish." If you know the will of God, you'll know the kinds of prayer God likes to answer, and you can say, "It's regulated by the revealed will." But even the Lord Jesus had to say, "But not My will, but Thy will be done." In other words, there's something God may be up to, and so we pray knowing that we're praying according to the revealed will but submitted to the fact that God has a secret will. A secret will.

Even when Paul says, "The Spirit of God comes because of this. We do not know how to pray." Romans 8:26. We do not know what to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. He says, "Sometimes your knowledge of the revealed will still can't produce the right kind of words and the right understanding of what to pray for. So God gives you His Spirit who translates it. Why? And He searches the heart. He knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. When we know God's will, we know how to pray.

We submit it to things we don't know that He's up to. Why? Because we pray without ceasing for the same reason we rejoice always, because it's predicated not on the circumstances, it's predicated on the certainties. That is that God is good and He only does good, and God is worthy. And if you're in Christ, you are welcomed. Kids figure out whose will is in their favor with mommy and daddy. You know how dad feels. "Hey, mom, I was wondering..." "You know mom, she don't play." "Hey, dad." We pray. We pray unceasingly.

God says, "I'll give you pictures of this. Go to the temple." There's incense which unceasingly went up as an aroma representative of the prayers of the saints. God says, "Bring me your prayers and let them never stop, because when you delight in me and depend on me and are submitted to me, they're sweet aromas to me." He says, "You know Me." I know bad parents who give their kids what they're asking for. The Bible says in Luke 18, "Jesus told them this parable so that they would pray and not faint." There's a person who eventually got tired and so they did it. He said, "I'm not like them. I'm eager." Pray without ceasing, ongoing, persistent, perpetual attitude of dependence and delight.

Probably the greatest contribution my father gave to me was showing me both scheduled prayer and what they call ejaculatory prayers, pop-up prayers, prayers in the moment. I'm at the store, "And so, father, I just... Hold on. Excuse me, is this 5,99? Thank you. Like I was saying Lord..." It rubbed off on me. I do it all the time. Pray unceasingly.

But then lastly, give thanks to the Lord in all circumstances. Someone said, "When joy and prayer are married, their firstborn is gratitude. When joy and prayer have a baby, they're firstborn is gratitude." "We're having a little girl, Grace, Gratia." Gratitude, thankfulness is a right response based on a right recognition that one has received good and benefit. Thankfulness is when you feel again, when you're moved to rightly respond because you rightly recognize that you have received good and benefit. Someone also said, "Gratitude is hard to find. If you want to find it, you better look in the dictionary."

And then as Christian to not only be grateful, but to be grateful in all circumstances, all circumstances. A story is told of Alexander White, minister in England, famous for pulpit prayers and thanksgiving. One day, the weather was so bad, one of the congregants say, "Well, guess there's nothing for him to thank God for on a wretched morning like this." Preacher got up and said, "We thank thee, O God, that it is not always like this." Thankfulness always to the Lord is the ability to cultivate, the ability to see God's reliability in all circumstances and thank Him for what He's doing in the midst of it. And there will be hard times for the believers. This is a grace that we need God to produce in us. You say, "How? How can I be thankful in all circumstances?" One, look beyond you and look beyond your wants. To look beyond you and look beyond your wants is the first step in maintaining continual gratitude because it's us that get in the way and keep us from being grateful. Remember, the context is worship, and the song says, "I'm coming back to the heart of worship where it's all about You." Sometimes it becomes all about us.

It's like the man who had an injured hand and so he went into the post office. He said, "Excuse me, can you hand me an envelope?" The person said, "Oh yeah, sure." He said, "Is that it?" He said, "Oh, well, while you're at, can you also hand me a pen?" The person got a pen. He said, "Is that it?" He says, "Well, if you'd be so kind, would you write this note for me? I mean, you see, I injured my writing hand." He said, "Oh, sure, what do you want it to say?" And he scribbled out the note, and he said, "So, is that it?" He said, "And can you sign it?" And so he signed it. He said, "Okay, is that it?" He said, "Can you just put, "P.S. Please excuse the handwriting."

Something about that moment made him forget what was benefiting him or done to him as he began to think about himself. He says, "Always." How? "Look away from yourself." But then don't just look away, you look to. Look to Christ and His will. Verse 18 be, "Because..." "And this goes for joy and this goes for prayer and now this goes for thanksgiving in all circumstances. Because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus means this is what God wants for His kingdom citizens, people who've had their hearts changed, people who've had the Spirit who comes in and gives joy, the one who invites you and welcomes you to pray, and the one who says, "Okay, you can give thanks because I am for you." He says, "This is Christ's will for you." He says, "Look to Christ, this is His will. This is His will." Not only in the good times, but even in circumstances where you can't really trace where He's doing it. There's a saying, "We trust Him even though we can't trace Him."

One of the earliest lessons we learned when we had kids was through a book that told us, "Develop your child's sense of security not based on proximity, but reliability." They said, "When you have a child, don't cultivate in them a sense of security based on proximity, but based on reliability." They said, "If you always have to have them near, and if they always have to see you, they're going to develop a sense of security that's based on the fact that they can trace you." They said, "But if you cultivate their sense of trust because you're reliable, they know, 'I don't see mommy, I don't see daddy, but I know when I go through these conniptions they'll be here. I know that they will be there because they're reliable.'"

God says, "I want you to know I'm reliable. And I want you to thank God even when you can't see me in the circumstance because I'm still the same yesterday, today, and forevermore." Look away from yourself. Look to Christ and His will. This is His will, to cultivate in us ability to trust Him even when we can't trace Him. Lastly, look to Christ's walk, look to Christ's walk. It says, "In Christ Jesus." In who better to learn how to be thankful in all circumstances than Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus. He modeled that storms are just instruments in His hand to demonstrate that He's present and that He's able. He can say, "Peace be still." He says, "You wouldn't know that about me unless you saw a storm." So be thankful even in a storm. Food shortages were just a means of cultivating this sense that man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. You wouldn't know that if there was never a food shortage. Disease is just an opportunity for Him to show off His healing power, that disease is no thing because He's Lord even over disease. How about death? Just an opportunity for Him to flex and to show that He is the resurrection and the life. In other words, look in the life of Jesus. He prescribes these scenarios so He can show Himself strong. He says, "This is the will of God for you who are in Christ Jesus." So look to Jesus and the way He walked when He was on earth. He Himself personally lived this. The Bible says He had a joy. It says, "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross." The Lord Jesus found a way to have joy even on the night when He was going to be betrayed, even during the time He was going to be beaten and bruised and battered and disfigured for people that He says, "For the joy of having relationship with you, for the joy of bringing you to myself, I accept the circumstance known as the cross."

I'm just saying, look to the Lord Jesus. He also is a prayer warrior. One of the longest prayers recorded in

the Bible is John 17. Again, a stone stone away from the cross, He prayed. And what does He do? He prayed for His glory. Then He prayed for His apostles. His prayer for himself is only a few verses. His prayer for His apostles and all who believe, you and me, is all these verses. What Jesus is saying, “Even on that night, I was thinking about the joy of having them, so I prayed more for them than I prayed for Me, because when I prayed I prayed not in light of the circumstance, but in light of the certainty.” God, let’s go. I hear you.

And He gave thanks. “O the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed looked at the symbols which symbolized His body which was about to be broken, His body which was about to be bruised, His blood which was about to be spilled.” And the Bible says, “He took the bread, He broke it, gave thanks and said, ‘This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’” We’re just talking about somebody who was able to have joy even in the face of the cross and to pray on the threshold of the cross and to give thanks even for the cross. Providence, I’m finished.

Come what may, we rejoice always. We pray without ceasing. We give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God for you who are in His kingdom. As we conclude, back when COVID was doing a number on us and we knew less than we know now, some of us were trying to figure, “Did we encounter COVID out there?” So we went and got a test so that they could see, “Well, what’s in here? Are there antigens in there? Are there antibodies in there. Because what’s in there will let us know what you’ve encountered out here.” These verses say, “If this kind of joy is in here, if this kind of prayer spirit is in here, if this kind of thankfulness that can endure all circumstances is in here, then you must have encountered God out here.”

Our practices declare to the world that He is present. May the Lord produce this in us and allow us to demonstrate He’s worthy, and then tell the world, “Come hear this witness because He welcomes you.” And if you’re not a believer here today, may that stick with you. The one who is worthy welcomes us even though we are not worthy. Father, we bless You. We thank You. Three imperatives power packed, because to pull them off, we need a whole lot more than just the command to do it. We need the power to do it. We need someone who is faithful always, someone who is faithful unceasingly, and someone who is faithful in all circumstances. That’s You. May we cling to You. May we rejoice in You. And may we ever live to be thankful for You and let the world see it so that our practice will scream volumes about the fact, among us, You are present. And if there’s anyone in here that does not know You, bring them to Yourself. We pray it in Jesus’ name. Amen.



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