

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

You and I all live in the presence of **God**. What does that actually **mean**? For one thing it means to be **aware** of Him, and to know that He sees and hears **all** of our words and actions. Of course, those words and actions don't always **line up** with what **God** would **like** to see in our lives. But the LORD is a **good** and **gracious** God, and the heavenly Father sent His Son, **Jesus**, to **pay** for all those improper words and actions, and to keep us **safe** from all **harm** and **danger**. The writer of Psalm 73 spoke for **every** believer when he wrote, *"I am always **with you**. You **hold me by my right hand**."* Through the merits of **Jesus** you and I have been **blessed** to be in a very **close relationship** with God - a relationship which is described as a **mother** or **father** holding the **hand** of their little child as they go for a **walk**. We know that we are always physically and spiritually **safe** in the hands of the LORD.

But the LORD will make His presence known in **another** way too. On the Last Day the LORD will **physically return** to the world to **judge** all people. His judgment will be **just** and **fair**, and it will be based on what we **believe**. Those who put their trust for salvation in **Him** will be taken into heavenly **glory**. While those who put their trust in **anyone** or **anything** else, will be sent away to suffer eternal **separation** from God in **hell**.

Knowing that the LORD takes care of all our needs **now** - both physical and spiritual - and knowing that He will **return** again to judge all people, will certainly have an effect on how we **live**. That was certainly the case for the Apostle Paul, and he wanted it to be so for the **Thessalonians** as well. So in our text for today, Paul reveals what it **means** to **Live In Faith And Love**.

In this first **letter** to the Thessalonians the Apostle Paul expressed his **feelings** toward them. He wrote, *"How can we thank God **enough** for you in return for all the **joy** we have in the presence of our God **because** of you?"* We were just privileged to experience another national day of **Thanksgiving**, and giving **thanks** to **God** for our fellow **believers** should **always** be on our radar. Here we read that the Apostle Paul was **ecstatic** when he heard about the **firm faith** of the Thessalonians, and he **expressed** his joy in a prayer of **thanksgiving** to the LORD. In fact, that was something he did **daily**. Paul told the Thessalonians, *"**Night and day** we are praying*

*earnestly to see you in **person** and to supply what is **lacking** in your faith.”* Paul was very **happy** that the Thessalonians had continued to have a **firm faith** in Jesus, even after **he** and his co-worker, **Silas**, had been forced to **leave** their city. Now he earnestly wanted to visit the Thessalonians **again**, so he could teach them even **more** about God’s Word, so their **faith** in Jesus would become even **stronger**.

But Paul knew that another visit wasn’t going to **happen** without **God’s help**. So he prayed, *“May God our Father **himself** and our Lord **Jesus** direct our way to you.”* Paul had only spent **three weeks** in the city of Thessalonica, preaching about **Jesus**, and explaining that the **Christ** had to **suffer**, and **rise** from the dead. But even after such a short period of time, a large group of **believers** formed in the city, and things were going pretty **well** - that is, until **persecution** broke out. The Jews became **jealous**, stirred up a **mob**, and started a **riot** in the city. As a result, Paul and Silas had to **flee** from Thessalonica.

For a long time Paul **worried** about what would happen to the Christians who were **left behind** in the city. But then he got some **good news**. Timothy reported that the Thessalonian Christians had remained **solid** in their faith in Jesus. Nevertheless, Paul couldn’t stop **praying** for his friends. Although their faith in Jesus was **strong**, it was still **incomplete**. Paul saw the Thessalonians as a glass that was still only **half full**, and for that reason he prayed, *“May the Lord increase your **love** and make it **overflow** for each **other** and for **all** people, just as **ours** does for **you**.”* Paul wanted these **half-full** Thessalonians to **overflow** with love in the same way that **his** love overflowed for **them**.

From these words of Paul we learn that **Living In Faith** gives us a great **privilege** - the privilege of **praying** to God for one another. That was not **always** the case. In Psalm 24 the Psalmist asks, *“Who may **go up** to the mountain of the Lord? Who may **stand** in his holy place? He who has **clean** hands and a **pure** heart, whose soul is **not** set on what is **false**, who does **not** swear deceitfully.”* As we look at ourselves according to our **sinful nature**, that’s **not us**. Our hands are **not** clean, our hearts are **not** pure, and we have been **false** and **deceitful**. And because our God is **pure** and **holy**, we can’t enter into His presence covered with sin. Our sins deny us **access** to God, and on our **own** we don’t have the necessary **password** to **gain** access to Him.

The **only** reason we have the **privilege** of praying to God is because of His **Son**. The Father's only Son became one of **us**, lived a life of **innocence**, and then offered that innocent life on the **cross** to pay for the sins of the world. By His sacrifice Jesus removed the **barrier** of sin, and won for us the privilege to approach **God** in prayer. It's a blessing which became ours in our **baptism**. Paul told the Ephesians, "*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleaning her with the washing of water in connection with the Word.*" Because of **Jesus** we have the **privilege** to pray to God for **ourselves** and for **one another** - anytime and anywhere. **Praying** for one another is a part of **Living In Love**.

Jesus invites us to step **away** from all the public **commotion** which is so **prevalent** at this time of year, and to find a **quiet** place - a place to get together one-on-one with our heavenly Father, and to **talk** to Him in prayer as the Apostle Paul did. Paul prayed, "*May the Lord increase your love and make it overflow for each other and for all people, just as ours does for you, so that he may establish your hearts as blameless in holiness before our God and Father, when our Lord Jesus comes with all his saints.*"

What do **our** prayer lists look like? When we are **Living In Love** we'll be **exercising** our privilege of praying for **others**. What are some of the things we can **ask** for them? While we certainly don't want to **omit** asking for **physical** blessings for them, we really need to **concentrate** on asking for **spiritual** blessings. We want God to clear the way for them to hear His **Word** - to **come** to faith, or to **strengthen** the faith they already **have**. In fact, **Paul's** prayer for the Thessalonians would be a **great** one for us to offer: "*May the Lord increase your love and make it overflow for each other and for all people.*" God gave us His **Son** - He saw to it that we were **baptized**, and filled us with the **Holy Spirit** - He continues to take care of **all** our needs day after day - and His **love** just keeps on **coming**, wave, after wave, after wave - **overflowing** love. Wouldn't it be **great** if our love for one another would **overflow** in the same way? Let's strive to speak the truth of God's Word from the heart, so that others can **join** us to **Live In Faith And Love**.

And let's never forget that Jesus is coming **back** to our world, and the **time** of His return is **near**. Paul prayed that his fellow believers would be **blameless** on that Day. The only way for that to even be **possible**, is through

our Lord **Jesus**. When Jesus lived here on the earth, no one could **convict** Him of a single **sin**. The **death** He **died** was to atone for **our** sins. He **bought** and **paid for** the lives of **every** human being. We **belong** to Him, and He wants us to **stay with Him** forever. Jesus said, "*Remain in **me**, and I am going to remain in **you**.*" Jesus **has** us, and He's **not** going to let us **go**. So when Jesus **returns**, we will stand **blameless** in the presence of God. That fact will **encourage** us to **grow** in our Christian living - to **Live In Faith And Love**. Amen.