

“The God Who Hears”

More About the End Times

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Rev. Jeff Stivason, Ph.D.

September 23, 2022

Jeff: Let me tell you what we’re going to do for at least the next few weeks. We’re going to do a study on 2 Thessalonians. So let me read 2 Thessalonians, and I’ll read the first five verses of the text, and then talk to you a little bit about the plan. So first of all let’s look at the text: 2 Thessalonians chapter 1.

“Paul, Silvanus and Timothy:

“To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

“Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith, in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.” Okay. This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Ted: You remembered.

Jeff: That’s right. So I’m looking at this text, and I’m calling it “Standing Firm in Times of Testing” because in some sense that’s what we’re looking at when we look at 2 Thessalonians. It’s true that that’s what we’re looking at when we look at both letters of the Thessalonians. I want you to keep in mind that this letter was written to a people who basically weren’t very old in the faith. And so Paul is writing to them; he’s encouraging them to stand firm.

And we’re going to see that it’s no hollow encouragement, because these people were being pressed upon by the government in their moment. You can see their youth in the faith by the questions they ask. For instance, they are shaken in their faith by somebody saying that the Lord Jesus had already come. So it’s a unique letter, and we’re going to be taking a look at it.

How are we going to look at it? Well, I want us to look at it in six lessons if we can. But I have come to realize with you men that that doesn’t always mean six lessons. *(Laughter)* And I don’t want to stifle this; this is just a plan and a path. And so I don’t want to stifle any conversations or questions, or anything that should come up. So please feel free to engage as we go through this.

But we’re going to look at “The God who Hears.” We’re going to look at “From Tribulation to Apocalypse,” “The Man of Lawlessness,” “Stand Firm; Pray for Us,” and “The Problem of Idles.”

One of the things that you’ll notice in this outline is that there are a couple of places that are clearly eschatological. And this letter has some end times aspects to it; it clearly does. In verse 5 you’re—

Gary Craig: I was going to say, is that the problem of idols?

Jeff: I’ll say something about it in just a second. *(Laughter)* So in this letter you’ll clearly see this idea of eschatology. In verse 5 he’s going to move right into really a kind of a general apocalypse. He says this is what is going to happen. And so we’ll see that.

“The God Who Hears”

And then you move in chapter 2 into the man of lawlessness. Who is the man of lawlessness? What will it be like before he manifests himself? What will it be like when he manifests himself?—those kinds of things. And so we’re going to look at that. And then he’s going to encourage us to stand firm as a result.

The thing that’s interesting, though, is that this text is really a text about prayer. When you think about Thessalonians, when people think about 2 Thessalonians they think naturally of the antichrist or the man of lawlessness, however you conceive of him. But the fact of the matter is that when you think about 2 Thessalonians and look at the occurrences, it’s really a book about prayer.

For instance, three times there is the mention of prayer in this text. And so I’ve looked at this text. And we’re not going to stick with this outline carefully. But it starts with prayer. And this first section closes with prayer: *“Pray for us.”*

And then it has a second section to it; it starts in 3:6 to the end of the chapter. And that section is on idleness—not idols, but being idle.

And you have to ask yourself: Why in the world would he attach the problem of idleness onto a letter that’s predominantly about eschatology and entices things and the motivation of prayer as a result? Why is he talking about idleness? And we’ll see this as we go along. But that’s basically the general direction that we’re going, and this is kind of the map. We can deviate from it as you like.

So first of all let’s think about some introductory matters. And in order to get our minds around 2 Thessalonians, in order for you to get your minds around any of the letters to the Thessalonians, we need to go back to Acts chapter 17. So let’s just go back there a second to Acts chapter 17.

And in Acts chapter 17 we find that Paul is in Thessalonica; he’s there with Silas. And this is the story of that; this is the account of that. It’s about nine verses long. And I want us to just hear that account. So let me read it to you; it’s an important account. And it sets the context of what we are looking at here.

“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apolonia they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in as was his custom. And on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’

“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous. And taking some wicked men of the rabble they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring him out to the crowd.

“And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them! And they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king—Jesus!’

“And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.”

Now I want you to think with me for just a minute about this. This is kind of an interesting thing. When you think about what’s happening here, here are some preachers basically entering into town, and they are proclaiming the gospel. But I want you to keep

“The God Who Hears”

this in mind. You have to keep in mind the fact that they are proclaiming a gospel that says “Jesus is King.”

Can I say it like this? For us the gospel has become anti-political or apolitical. In the first century the gospel was anything but apolitical. In other words, a presentation of the gospel meant a presentation that had political overtones to it, if not undertones and overtones. You have to remember that to proclaim Jesus was to proclaim Him as King.

I think there’s something lost to us today when we think about that. And maybe we think, well, it’s just a superstition of the day. And it wasn’t. What we are saying when we say “Jesus is Lord” is that “Jesus is King.”

I mean, for instance, think about Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is a Messianic Psalm. Psalm 2 is about the Messiah. All you have to do is look at the sections of Psalm 2 that are reiterated in the New Testament. In fact Psalm 2 is a favorite Psalm of New Testament authors.

And do you remember how Psalm 2 ends? Psalm 2 ends with a warning that says to the nations that you should kiss the Son now before it’s too late. And what they’re talking about then is kissing the feet of the mediatorial King—in other words, King Jesus. So the idea here is that Jesus is proclaimed as King, and the nations are to kiss His feet.

Now how does that work out? Well, I think it works out like this: the church is the primary vehicle for the gospel to go forward. But the church then proclaims that gospel to the nations. People who are in power hear it; people who are in government hear it. They embrace it. And as they embrace it they begin to live and govern like Christian people. And that’s how the mediatorial Kingship is acknowledged by the nations.

Now I think, for instance, that we’re fairly uncomfortable with that, because we would rather let non-Christians govern us. And we have this suspicion about Christians governing us, and we’d rather keep church and state absolutely 100% separate. And yet we need to keep in mind and understand that this was a foreign concept to the first century.

And so here are these men; they’re turning the world upside down. The funny thing about this is that these men are being said to turn the world upside down, when it is their opponents who are getting the riffraff from towns, creating a mob, and then inciting violence against these people in the city. And I think the irony of all this is in verse 5. “They are turning the world upside down and creating an uproar.” But they are the ones that have attacked the house of Jason. You know, it’s just the irony of it. “These Christians are turning the world upside down! But we’re going to burn this guy’s house down and tear him out of his home and drag him before the authorities.” It’s kind of funny when you think about it.

So here we have a church that’s certainly in a very rough patch. And what’s the problem? The problem is that they are creating a context wherein they’re challenging the dogma of Caesar. Think about it. They are upsetting or upheaving the doctrines or the decrees that translate into the doctrines of Caesar.

Now think about that. What were the doctrines of Caesar? Well, the Pox Romana—all that goes into thinking about the Roman world at the time, Roman justice—all of these things. But I’ll tell you what else goes into this. And that is that the Caesar has come to think of himself as God or a god, as divine. And so here we have these men coming along and saying that not only is there another King—King Jesus,—but that this King is actually

“The God Who Hears”

the Son of God. And that strikes at the very heart of this whole idea of the dogma of Caesar. Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: Ironically I think that the Communists get it better than we do. In China and North Korea, even though they are officially atheists, they seem to think that they are divine; they have the final say-so. In North Korea, if you own even a portion of the Bible it's a capital crime. So they realize that Christianity is a rivalry and that Christ is King, even though they don't acknowledge it.

Jeff: Yeah, absolutely. And there's a sense in which, just by the acknowledgment of them receiving worship and adoration—those kinds of things—there's an acknowledgment that there is a spiritual battle going on. These world leaders see themselves as—can I say it?—supernatural. And so you're right, Don; they see themselves as over against anything other than them as supernatural. It's easier for us to look at them and see the context of a supernatural battle going on. “We fight not against flesh and blood, but against powers and forces of the spiritual realm.”

So the idea then is that there is another King, and His name is Jesus. And these men who are proclaiming this are accused of what? They're accused of sedition; they're accused of treason. And so what you do when you look at a text like this, even in a cursory way like we're looking at it, I can't help but think that we have our own present moment which comes to mind.

I don't know about you, but there's a sense in which I think that our present moment is something like a *kyros* moment. And when you think about a *kyros* moment you think about it in contradistinction to a *chronos* moment.

Chronology is sort of time passing along. A *kyros* moment is a life-defining moment; it defines all other history. So for instance a *kyros* moment might be where were you on 9/11? Some of us can tell you exactly where we were, what we were doing, what we were wearing, what our wives were cooking in the kitchen—those kinds of things. Why? Because that is such a life-defining moment where time seems to have stopped; that's the idea.

And I don't know about you. But I feel that in some ways our country is in a *kyros* moment. Things have changed to the extent not that the country is unrecognizable right now. But certainly, if we continue to move in the direction we're moving in, it's likely to become unrecognizable.

You know, I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. But I was just telling my wife the other day that probably fifteen or twenty years ago I was saying this to my congregation at one point. And I was saying it because I had a group of Republicans in my congregation that were incredibly strong-minded Republicans. And it was almost as if Republicanism was going to be the savior of all. And so if we could just get a Republican it would all be okay.

And what I was telling them was that no political party is going to save us. And my point was that if the country does not repent and return to the Lord, then what's going to happen is, we are not going to stand.

And I was simply telling my congregation this at one point. I said, “Tell me the country that has stood faithfully and not degenerated at some point. Is it Syria? Babylon? Is it Jerusalem? Is it the U.S.S.R.? You tell me who it is that has stood century after century, decade after decade or year after year.

“The God Who Hears”

We’ve been going since the 1700s. But we’ve degenerated to the point that at some point we’re going to collapse. And I feel that if we continue on in the direction we’re going that we’re going to be unrecognizable.

And in my mind, at least as I see it, we’re at a *kyros* moment. And that produces the question: how shall we then live? How do we live in the midst of the moment we’re given? And we are given this moment in God’s providence. Whether we’re given this moment because of our sinfulness—personally or collectively—the question is how do I live in the moment? You kind of feel that you’re a lighthouse against the breaking waves.

But we need to ask ourselves: what do we know about 2 Thessalonians that will help us to understand how to live in this present moment? Well, we know some things. We know that not only is the preaching that Jesus is King infuriating people, but we also know that there is talk of tribulation and apocalypse in this text.

For instance I want you to know something. We’re going to look at affliction. And affliction is full-orbed; it’s economic, it’s social; it’s mental, it’s physical; it’s all of those things. But I want you to understand something. He uses another word, the word *persecuted*. And the word *persecuted* used to describe this affliction can mean anything from “harass” to “put to death.” And so it has a spectrum to it. And I think that we can find ourselves in that spectrum very easily. We’re going to talk about that along the way.

But also the man of lawlessness. Who is he? We always hear talk like this. Do you think the man of lawlessness could be with us today? Do you think he’s been born yet? That’s a question that’s a really good one for setting this text in its context. Who is the man of lawlessness, and how should we identify him? Will we be able to spot him early, or will we have to wait until later? Those kinds of things are important questions; we’re going to think about that.

The premium above all in this letter is that it’s a letter of encouragement. You don’t really think that way when you’re looking at these other things—tribulation, apocalypse and lawlessness. But the fact of the matter is that this is preeminently a letter of encouragement. And I want you to see that in just a minute.

If you look in 1:3 of the letter, notice this; look at what he says. “*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right.*”

How about 1:11? 1:11 says, “*To this end we always pray for you: that our God may make you worthy of His calling.*” And then 2:13: “*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers, beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved.*”

And then 3:1: “*Finally, my brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as has happened among you.*”

Now do you know how we ought to live in a world that seems to be degenerating? Wherever you happen to be—in our country or in another country, wherever you happen to be,—one of the primary things that a Christian ought to be doing is praying. Now here’s the struggle. I think the struggle is that we have a tendency to devalue prayer. And I think we have a tendency to devalue prayer because in our minds we think that it doesn’t really work the way we hope it might.

In other words, we want it to work like a vending machine. We want to pray, we want to put in our coin, and we want to get our product out. When it doesn’t work like that we

“The God Who Hears”

become frustrated; we become passive about prayer. And we read our bibles but we don't really pray.

I'm not going to ask for a show of hands. But my guess is that in terms of the people of God, people of God spend most of their time reading Scripture and not praying. Why? Because as a cost/benefit analysis you get more out of reading than you get out of praying, because at least I'll know something when I get done reading. But I may not have an answered prayer when I get done praying.

So if something has got to go, it's going to be prayer. And what I would encourage you to do is the same thing that Paul would encourage us to do, and that is to pray. We need to be people of prayer.

One of the things that I would say to you—and this is a bold statement,—but if things are not going the way you wish they would go, then perhaps you're not engaging God in prayer. It's not that God is going to give you your heart's desire just because it's your heart's desire. But my guess is that if you're spending a lot of time with Him in prayer, your heart's desire is going to change and become more like His heart's desire. When it becomes more like His heart's desire, you'll see that there are a lot of things happening around you that you are happy about.

Let me ask this: For what do we pray? When we pray, what are we supposed to pray for? Well, we are supposed to pray for the kingdom of God to come. All you have to do is think about Luke 11:1-4.

Transcriber's Note: Luke 11:1-4, NKJV. *“Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’*

“So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’”

Jeff: That's the Lord's Prayer. If you want to know what to pray for, then you turn to that prayer and you start praying.

Now let me say a couple of words about prayer in general. What is prayer? When you think about it, what are we doing when we pray?

Well, sometimes prayer looks like this? It looks like a stream of consciousness. We get into our cars in the morning. And we start driving down the road and we say, “Hey God, it's me. You know, I'm just going to work again. You know, I'm tired this morning. I didn't have my coffee; I have to stop and get it. So I'm going to hit the pause button. I'll get out real quick and then I'll get back in, and then we'll get back on to this. But I'm going to have a really tough day today because Sally is back to work and she's a real pain in the butt, and I'm just not looking forward to that.”

That's the way we pray; it's like a stream of consciousness! And then we wonder why our prayers aren't answered. And I'll tell you why our prayers aren't answered. It's because we're saying nothing. It's because it's just a stream of consciousness. It's really psychiatry; that's what it is. Prayer has become psychiatry; it's talk therapy. I'll just talk to God, and in talking to God I'll feel better. And so I'll just talk to God.

But that's not prayer. When you pray you are to pray in a very particular way. This is not the key to prayer; this isn't the magic of prayer. This is just what the Bible says.

“The God Who Hears”

When we pray we are to pray the promises that God has given. And we are to give God no rest until He answers the promises that He has given.

Let me give you one place in the Scriptures where this is the case, and there are others. You can go with me if you'd like to Isaiah 62. In Isaiah 62 we read about watchmen on the wall.

Now listen to this.

*“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen.
All the day and all the night
They shall not be silent.
You who put the LORD to remembrance,
Take no rest.”*

What are they putting Him in remembrance of? His promises?

*“And give Him no rest until He establishes Jerusalem,
And makes it a praise on earth.”*

Like He has promised to do. In other words, God has promised things to Jerusalem. You watchmen, you prayers, give Him no rest until He makes good on His promises. That's the idea.

Now I want you to see something else. How about chapter 56.

Ted Wood: Of what? Isaiah?

Jeff: Isaiah. In chapter 56 of Isaiah one of the things that we find is that we find another passage about watchmen. Now listen to what it says in light of what I just said. I'll start in verse 9.

*“All you beasts of the field, come to devour;
All you beasts in the forest,
His watchmen are blind.
They are all without knowledge;
They are silent dogs; they cannot bark,
Dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.”*

Now I want you to think about this. Here we have this picture of dogs who are silent; they're not good watchmen. In other words, they're not barking. We have a tendency to think to ourselves that well, this is the enemy and they're creeping through the gate. And these dogs are silent, not warning the people.

Yes, in one sense that's very true. But why is the enemy slipping through the gate? The enemy is slipping through the gate because the dogs are silent, because they've not been lifting their voices to heaven and calling on God to make good on His promises.

Look at this. In verse 11 of this text:

*“The dogs have a mighty appetite;
They never have enough.
They are shepherds who have no understanding;
They have all turned to their own way,
Each to his own gain, one and all.”*

Now we learn that these watchmen, these silent dogs, are the shepherds of God's people. And they have no concern to call upon God to make good on His promises. But each turn to their own gain.

“The God Who Hears”

And so here we have this beautiful picture. And we can go to another place in Isaiah and find where the watchmen sees God answering His promises and rejoices because God has answered His promises. The point is that when we pray we are to pray God's promises down on us.

Now you say, “Okay, you're talking about the prayer of Jabez.” No, I'm not talking about the prayer of Jabez. Think about it. We've got to be wise about what it is that's promised to us.

For instance, when you think about the Old Testament, you think about the prayer of Jabez. The prayer of Jabez is not given to me. The prayer of Jabez is given in a particular context and prayed by Jabez under the Old Covenant. You can pray it if you want to. But you can't expect it to happen like the guy who wrote the book and made millions of dollars on it. For him the prayer of Jabez was answered. (*Laughter*) But I've got news for you: it's not going to be answered for you that way because that's not how it's meant to be prayed.

How is it that you pray down the promises of God? Well, that's pretty clear. One way is to pray “*Thy kingdom come.*” Pray that God's name will be hallowed. Pray for your daily bread. Pray for the forgiveness of sins. Pray that you'll not be led into temptation. Pray for those things; those are promises of God that you pray down. And God is good and will answer those things.

Let me give you another one. The Puritans used to scour the New Testament, not looking for the prayer of Jabez but looking for the promises of God so that the people of God could pray them down. And so for instance one of those Puritans made a list of the promises of God, and this is really fascinating. For instance, he listed Matthew as one of those promises: Matthew chapter 1.

And in Matthew chapter 1 it says in verse 21: “*She will bear a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*”

We look at that and we read it. And we say, “Well, of course He'll save His people from their sins.” He'll save His people from their sins on the cross. He'll save them from their sins ultimately when He returns; we'll be with Him and glorified.

But the Puritans said no. When I'm struggling with my sin God has promised to deliver me from my sin. Acts 13 says that was something the law as unable to do. Jesus is able to do that.

So for instance, when I go to prayer, one of the things I say is, “Lord, I'm struggling with x. And in Matthew 1:21 you sent Jesus to save me from my sin. And so, Lord, help me. Deliver me from the clutches of this sin.” And that's the way we pray. Lord, You don't want me in the clutches of sin, nor do I want to be: I belong to You. So free me from it. And that's the way we pray. We pray the things that God has promised to do for us.

So when we pray, we pray “*Thy kingdom come.*” I've been rattling on, and I think this is important for us to get into our heads. A stream of consciousness is good if you need talk therapy. But if you really want to pray then you really need to pray the promises of God—not with a coin in the slot machine,—but think about this a minute.

These watchmen in Isaiah 61 and 62 are praying all day and all night; it's not easy. It's not like I'm just going to pray. And man, I have this sin, and I prayed Matthew 1:21 like

“The God Who Hears”

Jeff says, and it’s not happening. You know, that was Tuesday and this is Wednesday, and I’m still struggling.

No; remember Isaiah 62. All day and all night, not giving Him rest until He shows up! I mean, that’s the kind of thing. You know what? You are the bride of Christ; be a nag! *(Laughter)* Okay? You know, that’s the deal! So any questions, thoughts or comments that you want to wrestle with through that? Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: Because most of us have grown up with saying the Lord’s Prayer in church, it can tend to be mechanical. Is there a way that you’ve found to pray the prayer and all of the material contained in it in a heartfelt way, not just reciting the words?

Jeff: Yes. That’s a great question and I’m glad you asked. If you want a great example of how to pray the Lord’s Prayer, if you want a great example of how to turn the commandments of God into prayer, if you want a great example of how to turn the Apostles’ Creed into prayer, then get Luther’s little volume *A Simple Way to Pray*. It’s about 30 or 35 pages.

It was written in response to his barber asking him, “How do I pray?” And Luther wrote this 35-page book and had it published, because he figured that “if my barber is asking me, then other people must have the same question.”

It is a terrific little book; I absolutely love it. And it’s not the Luther that we know. For instance, you always hear pastors and teachers saying, “Did you ever hear of Martin Luther? Martin Luther said he had a busy day ahead of him, so he prayed three hours this morning instead of his regular—“; that sort of thing.

And that’s not Martin Luther. Read this little book. Martin Luther says, “If you only have a little time, then pray a little. And if you have a little extra time, then pray a lot. And if in the midst of your prayer you feel dry, then don’t work through it. If you want to work through it, work through it. But if not, put it down and pick it up later.” And then he talks to you about how to work through the petitions. It’s just a fantastic little book.

There’s a story that goes along with this little book. His barber who asked him how to pray went over to his son-in-law’s house for Easter dinner. And his son-in-law was an idiot. And his son-in-law thought he had to get to immortality. He thought that a witch doctor or a witch of some sort had cast a spell on him and that he couldn’t die. He had been through a couple of skirmishes and battles and he wasn’t dead, and he thought that proved his case.

And so he instigated his father-in-law, Luther’s barber, to stab him. Luther’s barber had a few too many that day enjoying Easter, and stabbed him, and killed his son-in-law. And so the authorities prosecuted him.

Luther actually wrote a letter on his behalf. And so instead of being put to death he was sent into exile. And that was Luther’s barber.

Brave Man: Wow!

Jeff: R. C. Sproul wrote a book—

Ted: Was he sent to Martin’s Vineyard? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: He was sent to Martin’s Vineyard. *(Laughter)* R. C. Sproul wrote a book called *Luther’s Barber*. It doesn’t have that part of the story in it, I don’t think; I’ve never read it. But I can’t imagine that he’s telling little kids that Luther’s barber stabbed his son-in-law. *(Laughter)* Anyway,--

David Miller: What’s the name of the book again?

“The God Who Hears”

Jeff: *“A Simple Way to Pray.”* If you have trouble getting it, let me know.

Don Bishop: It’s on Amazon.

Jeff: There’s a study guide that used to be promoted by Ligonier. It’s by Archie Parrish, and I think it has Luther’s *A Simple Way to Pray* at its core. But you can just get the book *A Simple Way to Pray*, and it’s a terrific little book.

Anyway, okay. So *“Thy kingdom come.”* There are reasons why we should pray this prayer. Let me go back. When you look at what we’re looking at here, one of the things that I think you can conclude is that Paul is praying *“Thy kingdom come.”* I think that’s part of his prayer that he’s praying when he asks the Thessalonians to pray and when he prays himself: bring Your kingdom.

And when we think about the Kingdom coming, one of the things we have a tendency to do is to think about the Kingdom coming out there. That’s not the way the Kingdom comes. Remember what Luke tells us. He says, “When people start to say, ‘Look; it’s there, it’s there!’” Jesus says, “No, the Kingdom is in your midst. It’s in you; it’s inside of you.” And that’s how it manifests itself outwardly.

So when we pray *“Thy kingdom come,”* one of the things that we need to be doing is to say, “Lord, bring Your kingdom more into my life—Your rule and Your reign in my life. And then let that rule and reign work itself out around me.”

And hopefully, if I’m saying that, if I’m saying, “Let the rule of Christ work itself out in my life,” and you’re praying the same and we’re all praying the same, guess what? We’re going to see a manifestation of the kingdom of God! That’s the idea, right?

If you’re a lesser magistrate, like we find in the New Testament, as we find these people who work for Caesar, then the rule of reign is going to be making inroads into the house of Caesar. And that’s the idea; that’s the way that God’s kingdom comes on earth. And so that’s the way we ought to be thinking about it.

Now why do we know that God is going to answer and make good out of that prayer? Well, the first thing that I would say to you is that Paul knows God. There are three aspects that he knows about God. First of all I want you to know this: first is the nature of prayer.

I want you to think about something he says as you think about the nature of prayer, and prayer as we just discussed it. Look at what he says. *“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right.”*

Now I want you to think about this for just a second. Who is the *you* in that prayer? Look at it: *“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right.”* Who is the *you*?

Ted: Isn’t that the Thessalonians?

Jeff: It’s the Thessalonians. *“We ought always to give thanks for you,”* you brothers in Christ.

The question is, what makes it right that they ought always to give thanks for you? Why is it an obligation that they pray and give thanks? And here’s the answer: because they’re praying *“Thy kingdom come.”* “You, brothers, are a manifestation of the kingdom of God coming in Thessalonica.” That’s the clear implication. Paul says, “We are giving thanks because the kingdom of God has come and manifested its rule in your lives in Thessalonica.” That’s what we’re praying and giving thanks for. That’s the nature of prayer, as I’ve just talked to you about—praying down God’s promise.

“The God Who Hears”

So when we pray and ask God to do this sort of thing, we see this as an answer. God answers the petition because it is the promise that He gives.

Second, *the nature of God Himself*. This is very brief; I want you to hear this. God is wise, omnipotent and good. That’s what the *Westminster Confession* says.

I want you to know that I feed on that daily, because when things are not going the way I would have them to go, and I start thinking that I’m all wise, I remember what the Confession says. The Confession says that God is wise, God is good and God is all-powerful. And if I believe He’s good, and I believe He’s wise and I believe He’s all-powerful, then I can shut my mouth. And I can content myself in His providence, even though I may not like it. My problem is myself at that point, not with God. My problem is the idea of working my mind around the fact that this is what’s happening in God’s kingdom right now.

Now I want you to know something. You need to understand; that means that when things are going bad, that may not be good. But things are going bad for a reason. In other words, think about it. If they’re going bad in my life personally, I need to ask myself. Is God chastening His son? What am I doing? What am I harboring? What am I not letting go of? What am I doing to be chastened like this, if I am being chastened? I need to ask myself those simple questions.

If I’m living in a country that seems to be going down the tubes I need to ask myself a simple question. What are we doing as a country that we need to be turning from? Now I think we can all answer that. There are many things that we could be turning from as a nation.

But you begin to see how you can view providence, and how you can view God as good and wise, and so on. And yet there is always a reason for thanking Him. There’s a reason for thanking Him because when we pray He answers prayer—when we pray not a stream of consciousness, but when we pray His promises, His promises are answered.

The third is this: *the nature of knowing itself*; the nature of certainty. You’ve got to wrap your mind around this. And I find that the more I mature in Christ the easier it is for me to wrap my mind around the certainty in this whole thing. I have no doubt that God answers His promises when we plead them; I just have no doubt about it.

And I think that as we grow in Christ and as we find ourselves nearer and nearer to Him, not because of anything that we’ve done but because He has brought us near to Him because of Christ’s death, there’s a developing sense of certainty about this whole thing. And I think that’s what we see here.

Is it right to give thanks to God for His ever-expanding kingdom? If the answer is yes to that question, then we ought to be praying; it’s that simple. Okay?

Secondly, he saw what was happening in the church. Paul saw what was happening in the church. What did Paul see that was happening in the church that made him realize that God was indeed answering prayer? Well, he saw faith growing abundantly.

I mean, think about this. If the Kingdom is coming, it’s manifesting itself by evidence. Faith is growing and it’s growing abundantly, and he sees that.

The question is, what is faith? We’re going to talk about this a little bit more next time. But it’s *notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia*. *Notitia* is knowledge; *assensus* is assent to what we know, and *fiducia* is a heart embrace of these things; I love these things.

“The God Who Hears”

The demons have the first two: *notitia* and *assensus*. They do not have a love for what they know and assent to. And so the demons have demon-like faith. Saving faith is all three.

Now saving faith, being all three, you see as a growing faith, objectively and subjectively. What do I mean by that? Well, objectively I mean that we learn about the faith we say we embrace with a capital F. So I read the Scriptures; I study theology. I learn objectively that Jesus is God; the Trinity is true. I learn all those things objectively.

But what do I do subjectively? Subjectively I put these things into practice in my life. And that means that my faith is stronger and weaker at times. So I learn about the objective faith in my life. My life is actually growing in accord with the objective faith I know. There's a growing process. Here it is, the objective faith. And my life is moving toward that expression of faith. And so it's learning and practicing; that's the idea.

Secondly, it's faith working itself out in love. And the question that we have to ask ourselves is: what is love? Well, think about it. If I give you a commandment to grow five inches tomorrow, you're not going to be able to do that. But if I tell you to grow, increase, abound more in love for x person tomorrow, you can actually do it. You may not be able to grow, but you can increase your love for people

And that's the idea. And how is that possible? I'll tell you how it's possible. It's because faith always reaches toward its object, which is Christ. When faith reaches toward its object it increases and abounds.

And then I want you to notice this. Notice this; this is great. It's 1 Thessalonians 3:11, and we'll end here. Paul says this; he's praying. *“Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another, and for all.”*

So what is he doing? He's praying in this first letter that their love would abound more and more for all.

Now go to 2 Thessalonians 1:3. *“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right.”* Why? *“Because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.”*

Did you hear that? In the first letter he prays that their love would abound toward one another. And in the second letter he says that their love is abounding. “I'm seeing this prayer answered”; that's the idea.

So one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that what we see is God answering His prayer to bring about His kingdom. And there's evidence for that: their faith is growing; their love for one another is growing. These are manifestations of the kingdom of God in the world. And we ought to be working toward that as we pray to the Lord for that.

So I think that despite the fact that we may be living in a time of turbulence, much like in the first century, I think that there is much reason for encouragement when you look at a letter like 2 Thessalonians. God answers prayer; He brings His kingdom. His kingdom has manifestations of evidence. And we ought to delight in that.

So that's all. I'm sorry I'm over five minutes today. I wanted to sort of end on a happy note. *(Laughter)*

“The God Who Hears”

All right, let's pray. Father, thank You for this day. Thank You for the time You've given us. Thank You for reminding us, Lord, that You are a prayer hearing God; You listen. Thank You for reminding us that You answer prayer, and we delight in You for this. And we ask that You'll make us a praying group of men. Lord, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)