

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-13** <sup>9</sup> For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, <sup>10</sup> night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? <sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. <sup>12</sup> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, <sup>13</sup> so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

## He wants you home for Christmas

Christmas is coming. Imagine you are parents whose children are far from home and in danger. What do you want more than anything else for Christmas? You want them home and safe. You would do anything to have them home safely. Anything but force them to come home.

Paul desperately wanted the Thessalonians home safely for Christmas. Do you know what the word “advent” means? It means “coming”. It is the same word used in verse 13 of our text. Paul knew that Christ was coming. That Christmas was coming. Not the first Christmas when Christ came to earth, but the second Christmas when Christ would come a second and final time to this earth. This is why this text is put here in the first Sunday of advent. It is a text which shows us God’s love and how desperately He

wants you home for Christmas. Not your home of wood and stone but His heavenly home. Christmas is coming. What wouldn’t you do to get your children safely home? What didn’t God do to see the Thessalonians safely home for Christmas? What won’t He do to see you safely home for Christmas?

Paul too wanted the Thessalonians safely home for Christmas. Paul had started that church and he loved them. They were his spiritual children so full of new life in Christ and yet so weak at the same time. Like a newborn baby. Full of life but so weak and helpless at the same time. These children had caused Paul so much parental distress. He had heard that there were lots of troubles among them. There were even rumors that they had fallen from faith. So Paul had sent Timothy to them to find out what was going on. This is what Timothy had found out. **1 Thessalonians 3:6-8** <sup>6</sup> *But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you --* <sup>7</sup> *therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.*

Timothy found out that they continued to stand strong in the faith and this is what precipitates Paul's offering up of thanks to God. Parents, if you had a child in Iraq and you heard that he might have died but then found out that he was alive, how great would be your thanks? That and more was what Paul felt because he wasn't worrying about death of the body. He was worrying about something much more important - death of the soul. He was worrying that their souls had died, that they had fallen from faith and when he hears they stood firm in the faith, His first thought was "thank God" and his second that he could never give enough thanks, that he could never thank God enough or properly for preserving them in the faith.

Now you might say, "well wasn't it the Thessalonians who owed God thanks for that". That is true. They did owe God thanks and could never render enough thanks, but so did Paul. Ask Marcy or the rest of you mothers. Does your baby, do your children, owe God thanks for their gift of life ( This amazing thing where a person body and soul is created out of nothing)? Do they owe God

thanks for that life which they have? Absolutely. But don't you also owe God thanks, more thanks they you can possible render for giving that little bundle of life into your heart and arms? Don't you owe God thanks more than you can possible ever render for the joy He has given in your children? Feeling their first kick, holding them in your arms for the first time, seeing them walk to you, grow as a person, make your proud. You bet you do.

If that child was far from home and they were in danger, danger from outside forces and danger from their poor decisions or weaknesses, what would you do to have them home for Christmas? Paul had quite a scare with the Thessalonians, his spiritual children, and when he found out they were still alive spiritually, He doesn't quit his prayers on their behalf . He is filled with joy and redoubles his prayers, night and day, praying exceedingly. It was their weaknesses and naivete and lack of instruction in the Christian faith that put them in danger of spiritual danger. So Paul's prayer to God is that he, Paul, might get back to them and complete what was lacking in their faith. Yes he wanted to see

them who he loved. Yes that would bring him great joy. But he wanted more than to just see them, he wanted to continue their instruction in God's Word so that they might never scare him so badly again, and more importantly so that their souls and faith might never be in such danger again. He wanted them home for Christmas.

Yet the Christmas he wanted them home for wasn't just a 12 day celebration in December. And it wasn't in an earthly home. He wanted them, body and soul, to be safe forever in God's heavenly home, celebrating Christmas eternally. Parents, isn't that what you want for your children too? To be free from harm and danger, to have joy and not sadness forever? That is what we want for our children. That is what Paul wanted for the Thessalonians. And that is what God wants for you and what only God can do.

Notice what Paul says. He wants to come to them that he might supply what they were lacking, correct their weakness, but to whom does Paul say is the one who really does that work? God our heavenly father. Paul knows that God alone can cause their

faith and love to increase to the point where it overflows toward one another. He knows that it is God alone who can bring them safely home for Christmas, not the one on December 25<sup>th</sup> but the eternal one by establishing their hearts, blameless in holiness and so as their spiritual parent, Paul prays for them night and day whenever he thinks of them that God would cause their faith and love to increase to the point where it overflows toward one another, that God would establish their hearts blameless in holiness.

Weren't the Thessalonians already blameless in holiness through faith? Absolutely! That is why Christ came as a child on that first Christmas. Born as man to redeem man from sin. Born as a man to do what we can't do for us so that you who are anything but blameless can stand before God as blameless. When Christ died on the cross there was forgiveness of sins for everyone and when the Holy Spirit lifts our heart in faith to grab on to it, it becomes your possession. A Christmas gift. A gift that gives every moment. Each day we are anything but blameless. Yet what Christ did on the cross still stands, washing away that sin each day, each

moment so long as faith clings to Christ. God did this because He want's you home for the heavenly forever Christmas. Only the holy can enter into and celebrate this eternal Christmas celebration. In Christ, you are holy.

So getting back to my question. Yes the Thessalonians and you by Christ and the Holy Spirit, are blameless in holiness. His prayer for them and my prayer for you is that your hearts might be established ever more in that holiness. That the Father by the Holy Spirit and Word and Spirit in the Word would preserve and protect and even increase your faith. God works through the gospel of the first Christmas, of the Christ child born to bring us peace with God, works to bring us to our second Christmas established firmly in the faith blameless and holy before God that He our heavenly father may open the doors of His heavenly eternal home to us children to celebrate Christmas forever. Yes thanks be to God. Thanks more than we can ever give and thankfully don't need to for which our thanks and joy abound evermore. Amen.

If you were in danger of not making it home, perhaps you

are a soldier captured by ISIS, how comforting would it be to know your parents were doing everything humanly possible to get you home? We are in danger like the Thessalonians while we are in this world but how comforting to know we have a heavenly father who has and will do everything Godly possible to get you home. Amen.

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