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End Times 3: Saints Triumphant - c  
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## **Pray, Holding On to God's Truth Till the End** **2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word from God through which the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith in Christ is 2 Thessalonians 2 and 3.

*We cannot help but give thanks to God for you always, dear brothers loved by the Lord, for God chose you from the beginning to save you as he sanctifies your spirit and you believe the truth. So he called you through our Gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold on to what was handed down to you, which you were taught whether by our words or our letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, who loved us and by grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope — may he encourage your heart and establish you in every good word and work.*

*Finally brothers, keep praying for us that the Lord's word may continue to run and be glorified, just as it was with you, and that we may be rescued from disorderly, wicked people. For not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and protect you from the evil one.*

*We are confident in the Lord concerning you that you are doing and will keep doing what we command. The Lord will rightly direct your hearts into godly love and Christlike patience. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5).*

This is the word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

When is Jesus coming again? That's an easy question. On the Last Day. When will that be? That's an impossible question. God has not told us. This does not mean that Jesus' return is unimportant. By one count the New Testament mentions his return 318 times (p. 1840, Concordia Self-Study Bible, Copyright © 1996 by Concordia Publishing House). That's arguably more than any other doctrine.

Jesus spent the last hours of Tuesday during Holy Week instructing his disciples about his return. But his focus was not on when but rather on what we are to be doing until he comes. Keep watch, he said, for he'll come unexpectedly like a thief in the night. Be ready like the wise virgins who had oil for their lamps when the bridegroom came. Be faithful servants busy with the work your master has given you until he returns.

God's Word today illustrates a key aspect of our work as faithful servants. Prayer. The Apostle Paul prays for the Christians in Thessalonica and asks for their prayers. He also commands them to stand firm and hold on to the teachings passed on to them. That too is the work of faithful servants.

So dear Christians friends, pray holding on to God's truth till the end. That's the

theme. We see in the text three things to pray for. When you pray, 1) give thanks for God's love, 2) seek the courage to do what's right, and 3) plead for our Lord's word to spread. Pray in these ways, holding on to God's truth till the end.

### **A. Give thanks for God's love**

The Christians in Thessalonica faced persecution from those who hadn't believe. There was also confusion about Jesus' coming. Some thought that he had already returned, and they had missed it. Others thought that since he was coming back why bother working. So Paul writes to instruct and encourage them in God's truth.

Were they worried about not being ready and missing Jesus' return? The Apostle points them to God's love. Notice this is not the generic love that so often comes across when people say: "Don't worry. Be happy. God loves you." And it's not a pat answer that rolls off the lips without any thought. We need to guard ourselves against that danger. We become so use to reciting John 3:16 or saying that Jesus loves us, died for us, and forgives us that we no longer think about what a profound wonder and amazing truth that is.

Generic love and pat answers do us no good when our conscience accuses us. How can I stand before the righteous Judge, sinner that I am? Who measures up to the blameless, sinless record God requires? Generic love and pat answers do us no good when our hearts worry us. How can I persevere in holding on to the truth and remain faithful till the end despite all the troubles, temptations, and false teachings that attack my faith day after day?

The Apostle directs your heart and conscience to the real answer, dear friend. Listen and marvel at the depth of God's love. "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14 NIV84).

"Loved by the Lord." Jesus is our Lord, and we are his people. But that was not always the case. We began life in rebellion against him. But how great his love! He paid the ransom price for us lost and condemned creatures. He redeemed us, purchased us to be his own dear people. How he calms our troubled hearts and minds! What truth to hold on to! What love to give thanks for!

This was God's plan from all eternity. "From the beginning God chose you to be saved." We didn't even exist. God's choice was based entirely on his gracious good will in Christ and not on anything in us. My certainty depends on God alone and not on anything in me. What truth to hold on to! What love to give thanks for!

Because of his grace that chose us, he set up the way to bring his salvation to you and me. "He called you to this through our gospel," Paul writes. Through the gospel, that good news of free forgiveness in Jesus, the Lord called you out of the darkness into his glorious kingdom. His gospel is powerful and effective to keep you in the one true faith until he returns. What truth to hold on to! What love to give thanks for!

Mark the work the gospel accomplishes within us. "... saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth." The Holy Spirit sanctifies

our spirit. Through the gospel he sets us apart for God, washes us clean from sin and guilt, clothes us with the holiness of Christ. So God counts you as holy and blameless. The Spirit's gospel work brings us to believe this truth. Faith receives God's promise. Faith knows and trusts that in the Judgment we stand blameless and holy not by our works but by the merits of our Savior Jesus Christ. What truth to hold on to! What love to give thanks for!

And finally, look at what God's love has in store for you who believe. He has done all this so "that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." What a rich salvation he has prepared for you — the glory of heaven before the throne of your Savior! What truth to hold on to! What love to give thanks for!

Pray with thanks that God's love has done all this not only for you but also for your fellow Christians. Paul could not help but give thanks for God's love shown to the Thessalonian Christians. So also we cannot help but give thanks to God for what his love has done for our fellow Christians.

Pray holding on to God's truth till the end. Give thanks for his love. And as we marvel at the greatness of that love, we are moved to seek the courage to do what's right. That, too, is part of our prayers.

### **B. Seek the courage to do what's right**

God's love is not a license for spiritual laziness. When faith grasps the wonder of his love, we become like a train engine ready to eagerly chug along doing what's right, fueled by God's powerful love toward us. Paul prays: "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" (2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17 NIV84).

So also, we pray seeking the courage to do what's right. How do we find that courage? By holding on to the truth of God's love. God answers your prayer and gives you courage and strength as you search his word seeking to know his love better and better.

God answers and gives you the courage you seek as you remember his gospel promise made to you in Baptism. Through water and the word, you were reborn as his child. Doesn't that give courage? The almighty God is your Father, dear Christian. So what can terrify us when we remember that our heavenly Father watches over us and gives eternal encouragement and good hope? Think about that hope. As a baptized child of God you are an heir of heaven through faith in Jesus. So what if we have to suffer here on this earth? So what if doing right brings ridicule from others? Paradise awaits us. What better hope could there be? What courage and strength to persevere in every good deed and word! What truth to hold on to as we pray! Keep seeking the courage to do what's right until the end when Christ returns.

### **C. Plead for our Lord's word to spread**

And finally plead for our Lord's word to spread. God's truth fills us with the longing for others to know the truth. Without faith in the gospel people are lost forever. Only God's truth saves. So the Apostle writes, "Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you" (2 Thessalonians 3:1 NIV84).

When we're holding on to the truth, we want others to be holding on to it as well.

So we pray for God's word to spread and bring others to faith. The time is short!

Jesus is coming. Don't ask when. Rather, watch and pray. Pray holding on to the truth till the end. Give thanks for God's love. Seek the courage to do what's right. Plead for our Lord's word to spread. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

### **A. Give thanks for God's love**

- 1) The Apostle's words remind us of some of the great things God's love has done for us. List some of them.

### **B. Seek the courage to do what's right**

- 1) How does God answer our pray and give us the courage and strength to do right?

### **C. Plead for our Lord's word to spread**

- 1) Why is the spread of God's word so important?