

What Do You Need The Most?

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Date: 03 May 2020

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Well, what does a Christian in lockdown really need? You know, it's in times of crisis like this that often force us to reconsider what's really important in our lives.

And for many people today, that seems to be toilet paper. For some bizarre reason, suddenly people have realized how much they value ordinary toilet paper. So it does, you know, crisis often causes us to change our value relative of certain things.

Well, I want to ask as a Christian, as Christians today, what are the most important things for us? What do we need right now in the state we're in?

And it's a vital question because even though we've on Friday gone down to level four lockdown, normal church activities are still a long way off. I mean, we don't even know if we'll be able to do what we normally did before, before the end of this year.

And so the things we normally got out of gathering together, we can't get right now. And so we need to be clear on what the essentials that we need really are.

[1 : 11] The vital things that we still need to be getting as Christians, as a church, even while we're in lockdown. You know, it's that moment on a plane when the cabin depressurizes and the oxygen masks drop down.

And suddenly you're not thinking about the in-flight entertainment or whether you want chicken or beef anymore. All you're thinking about is getting to that oxygen because you realize right now in this current state, that's what you need.

Well, what is it as Christians that we need in our current state? What is our oxygen, so to speak? What should we be focusing on more than anything else right now?

What should we be realizing that we really, really need? Well, it just so happens that this morning's passage tells us what we really need. Because in it, the Apostle Paul prays for the Thessalonian church to have those very things that he knows they need in the state they were in.

And in the crisis they were going through. You see, this prayer that he writes and prays for the Thessalonians that's recorded for us today is very appropriate for us.

[2 : 18] Because Paul's praying for a church that was going through their own crisis. In fact, in a very real way, they were in a state of isolation. Not the same as we are today.

But they also didn't have the luxury of normal ministry activities. Not because of pandemic. In their case, it was because of persecution. The Thessalonian church was planted by Paul.

We read about in Acts 17. You can read about that in your own time. It's a very interesting story.

And the thing is that Paul doesn't get to spend lots of time with them at all. He plants this Thessalonian church. He preaches the gospel.

Lots of people respond. But then within a few weeks, he's kicked out of the city. He's persecuted by the Jews. And he's forced to flee the city. Leaving the job with this new baby church plant.

Very much half done. And he writes to them a few months later. He writes these letters. Well, first Thessalonians at least. A few months later. When he's far away.

[3 : 20] And he was very worried. You can see as you read what he wrote to them. He's very worried about this baby church. And the state they're in.

So you can see it from the beginning of this passage. For example. Have a look in your Bibles from verse 1. 1 Thessalonians 3. He says. So when we could stand it no longer.

We thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy. Who is our brother and co-worker in God's service. In spreading the gospel of Christ. To strengthen and encourage you in your faith.

So that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact. When we were with you. We kept telling you that we would be persecuted.

And it turned out that way. As you well know. For this reason. Look what he says. For this reason. When I could stand it no longer. I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid.

[4 : 16] That in some way the tempter had tempted you. And that our labors might have been in vain. And that in itself is quite profound. You see Paul sees it as necessary.

To remind the Thessalonians. Just what a dangerous position they are actually in. Which they probably don't fully realize. And that's why he sent Timothy on this.

Probably quite dangerous. But vital mission to them. To find out how they were doing. Because you see Paul. Has a very realistic view of spiritual warfare.

The conflict. Spiritual conflict that is going on. Behind the scenes. Invisibly. Every single day. In our world. Paul was in touch with that. He knew what was going on.

And he knows. In this case. That the isolation. Of the Thessalonians. From him and his ministry. Is hugely dangerous. Because it could lead to them. Actually falling away from the faith.

[5 : 14] And forsaking the salvation. That they learned about. Because. He goes on to say. He knows. That the tempter. Exists. And is working.

He's referring of course. To Satan. Who is an intelligent. Real. Spiritual being. Whose mission. And focus. Is always. In any way he can.

To undo. Any work of gospel ministry. That's. Been done. Any good fruits. Good spiritual gains. Of. Gospel ministry.

Satan. Will do whatever he can. To reverse. And to undo. Look at verse 5 again. For this reason. When I could stand. It no longer. I sent to find out.

About your faith. I was afraid. That in some way. The tempter. Had tempted you. And that our labors. Might have been. In vain. You see. Paul knows. That. After just a few weeks.

[6 : 10] Of being with. These Thessalonians. And after he was forced. To leave. The moment he did. He knew Satan. Was ready. To step in. And start to undo. All that work. That he had done.

And so. Paul didn't want. The Thessalonians. To underestimate. The danger. Of their enemy. Especially. While they were isolated. From him. They needed to know. That this enemy.

Was real. And that he was working. To try undo. Paul's initial work. You know. Any. Military strategist. Knows the danger. Of thinking.

Too little. About your enemy. In war. Well. The same goes. For the Christian life. And so. It would be. Very dangerous. In our own. Current state. Of isolation.

That we're in. It would be. Very dangerous. To underestimate. Our enemy. As Christians. And to not. Realize. That he is. Still today. Just as much. As he was then.

[7 : 05] Looking. For every opportunity. To undermine. The work. That is done. In the life. Of Christians. We mustn't. Underestimate. How quickly. He can.

Use our current. Situation. Our current. Isolation. From normal church. How quickly. He will get in. And use that. To frustrate. And reverse. The good work. That's been done. In our lives. Don't underestimate.

That. Don't think. It can't happen. And so. How do we. God against that. How do we. God against him. Doing that. While we're in. The state. We're in. How do we. Counter it. Well. We do.

What Paul did. For the Thessalonians. And we pray. But we also. Look at. What he prayed. What he knew. Was vital. For the Thessalonians. To have. Three things.

He knew. They needed. In their isolation. That would combat. Satan's. Attempts. To. Use the situation. To take them down. And those. Three things. That we need.

[8 : 00] As much as they need. In the isolation. That we're in. Is the word. Love. And holiness. I want to look at each of those. In turn. Those are the three. Petitions.

That. Paul. Specifically. Prays for. At the end of this passage. From verse 11. So firstly. The word. Look at his first request. Now may our God. And father himself.

And our Lord Jesus. Clear the way for us. To come. To you. Okay. That's what he prays. He prays that he. Especially himself. And his. The band of. Of. Helpers.

That was around him. That they would be able to get. Back to Thessalonica. But why. Why was it so important. For Paul. Specifically. To get to them. I mean. Timothy. Had already got to them. Wasn't he enough.

You know. Wasn't he good enough. Well. It was because. Paul was an apostle. You see. That's the difference. And what that meant. Is that he. Was the source. Literally. Of God's word.

[8 : 54] To the Thessalonian Christians. You know. This was before the time. That the Bible. Was in the form. That we have it now. They didn't have God's word. Like we have it. They relied on the teaching.

Of the apostles. To know. The gospel. And to know God's will. For them. And Satan also knew that. And that's why. Satan did everything. He could. To keep the apostles away.

From this fledgling church. Look. Look back. Page back to. Chapter 2. Verse 17. Look what Paul says there. He says. Out of our intense longing. We made every effort.

To see you. For we wanted to come to you. Certainly. I Paul did. Again and again. But. Satan blocked our way. You see. Satan knows. That the best thing.

For the Thessalonians. Spiritually. Is for them to have. Access to God's word. Through Paul. And so Satan did everything. He could. To prevent that. Everything he could.

[9 : 50] To cut off. The Thessalonians. Access to the word. And Paul also knew that. He knew Satan's tactics. And so he was adamant. To counter it. In prayer. Verse 10.

Night and day. We pray most earnestly. That we may see you again. And supply what is lacking. In your faith. You see. He didn't want to just. See them because. They could have a good time together. And have a braai.

And chat. And it was fun. He wanted to see them. Because he wanted to get down to business. Of feeding them God's word. And building up their faith. In God's word. And God's promises. Well in the same way.

You know. In our current. State of isolation. One of Satan's primary. Objectives. Is going to be. To keep you away from the word. And to keep me away from the word.

He'll put distractions. In your daily life. He'll. Keep you too tired. To spend. Proper time. In God's word. He'll. Make you think you don't need the word. That you're fine without it.

[10 : 48] And you know what. He has much more opportunity. To do that now. Now that we're not gathering together. Physically. As Christians. You know. Gathering physically.

At least we could. Hold each other accountable. To coming to church. And sitting under God's word. You know. It's like exercise. It's much harder to be lazy. When you do exercise. With someone else. When you're accountable. To someone else. Than when you do it by yourself. But now. You see. While we're doing. Church like this. Remotely. That accountability. Is not there. I think it's one of the.

Major. Problems. With doing church remotely. Yes. We can still hear the word. We can still. See each other a bit. We can still pray. But one of the things. That is not there anymore. Is our mutual accountability.

And encouragement. Of each other. To. To carry on. Spiritual disciplines. To carry on. Sitting under God's word. And applying it. And living it out. You know. We don't know.

[11 : 41] Who's at church right now. And who's not. It's very hard. To have that. Accountability. That we once had. And Satan. Will. Try to use that opportunity.

Mark my words. He will. Use the opportunity. Of our natural laziness. That's already there. And now. Our new lack. Of accountability. And he will try to use that.

To detach you. From God's word. Before you even. Realize it. Watch out for that. And so. What can we do. To counter it. Well. We do what Paul did. And we pray.

That God. Frustrates Satan's plans. To do that. In our church. But also. I think we need to make. Extra effort now. More than before. Not just to engage.

Ourselves. With regular time. In God's word. At every opportunity. We have. And to sit under. Teaching of God's word. But I think we need to also. Hold each other.

[12 : 35] Accountable. To do that. Which we can still do. To a certain extent. Even. Remotely. And so. Here's what I want you to do. If you're a St. Mark's. Regular.

I want you to think back. To when we did gather. Physically at church. Think. Back to where you used to sit. Now I know. If you're anything like. A normal Christian. You probably had your.

Place that you went to. Every Sunday. People don't tend to move around. We're creatures of habit. So think. Where you sat. And think. Who sat near you. Think of one person.

Who sat near you. Normally. And I want you to phone them up. This week. And check up on them. See how they're doing. Ask them. You know. Are you able to access online church?

How's your. Your daily Bible reading and prayers going? Is there anything I can pray for you? Is there anything that you need? And that will go a long way. To helping your fellow Christians. To. To

stay in God's word.

[13:31] Which is so important right now. For all of us. In the situation. We're in. So that's the first. Real essential. We need. The second essential. That Paul prays for.

For the Thessalonians. Is love. Because the word of God. Is actually not enough. It's. Essential. It's necessary. But it's not sufficient.

For Christian growth. You know. Just being. Just being doctrinally correct. Is not good enough. And Paul was well aware of this. Elsewhere. He writes. If I have the gift of prophecy.

And can fathom all mysteries. And all knowledge. And if I have a faith. That can move mountains. But I do not have love. I am nothing. And this is something that.

We need. Serious reminding of. In the church. In the denomination. That we're in. Which rightly prioritizes. The correct. Teaching of the word. We still need to be reminded.

[14:28] That the point. Of all that. Correct teaching of the word. And being doctrinally accurate. The point of all of that. Is actually that we grow in love. Love. Jesus himself says.

Is the fulfillment. Of all of the law. And the prophets. It's the image of God. That we were made. To exhibit. And it's the heart. Of what the new creation.

Is going to consist of. What God saved us for. A community. Of. Perfect. Mutual. Love. Which is. Truly going to be paradise.

The paradise that we all. Long for. But we don't see in this world. That's what Jesus. Died. To save us for. And so that's why. Paul prioritizes it.

For these. Isolated Thessalonians. In his prayer. When he prays. In verse 12. May the Lord. Make your love. Increase. And overflow. For each other.

[15:23] And for everyone else. Just as ours does. For you. And it's true. Paul loved the Thessalonians. It was. It was because of his. Genuine love for them. That he went through. All that he went through.

And that he brought the words to them. And he wrote these letters. And that he agonized over them in prayer. Well that's what we need to do too. If we're going to go forward. As a church. We need to grow in genuine love.

Genuine love. Not just. Pretend love. Not just. You know. I. I say I love you. Because I have to. But I don't actually want to spend any time with you love.

No. Genuine love. Where we're thinking about each other. Where we want to see each other.

Where we're praying for each other. And we're genuinely concerned for each other. That's what's going to motivate us to care for each other.

And to serve each other. And to pray for each other. Is when we love each other first. Not just do those things out of duty. Because we have to as Christians. But do them because. There's a genuine.

[16:18] Love in our hearts. For one another. You know. Love. Love is the fuel. That makes a. A church go. And a church without love. It's like a car without petrol.

It might look nice. But it's not going to go anywhere. And it's not going to be very useful. And so. I've got to ask you. How much. If you're honest with yourself.

How much do you love. Your fellow Christians. In your church. How much do you genuinely. Love them. And one of the ways. You could tell. Is how much you actually pray for them.

Individually. And maybe. If you're honest with yourself. You must admit. That you're struggling to do that. Maybe you're struggling. Especially now. To think outside of your own. And your own families. Your own families. Your own families. Well let me tell you. You're not alone. You know. I struggle to love people. Outside of my. Immediate family. And the reason is.

[17:14] Because it's not natural. For us to do that. As sinners. But it's what God saved us to do. And so we must take that seriously. And it's why. We need to pray.

Seriously. To love. Each other. You know. If loving was. Natural. For us to do. Then Paul wouldn't need to pray for it here. But he does pray. Because it's not natural.

And yet God. Not only has called us. To love one another. And be a people of love. Not just in this world. But in eternity. But he's happy.

And ready. To help us to do it. If only we want. It as much. And so pray. Even if you don't feel love. For your fellow Christians now.

Because that. You know. It's not natural. Pray that God would. Give you love. For your fellow Christians. Desire it. Even if you're lacking it. Pray that you would love.

[18:11] Your fellow believers. As God has. Saved you to. And as God wants you to. That you would really love your church. Especially now. We need that more than ever. As we're separated from each other.

As we're isolated from each other. Love is going to be more difficult. To exercise. It'll require. More discipline. Setting aside. Time each day.

To think of your fellow believers. To pray for them. And to contact them. And not. By the way. Not to wait until. You feel warm fuzzy feelings for them. That's. That's what.

That's what our current culture tells us. Love is. But that's not. Biblical love. Biblical love is a command. And a decision. And it's. It's a. It's a. It's an exercise of the will.

Even if we don't feel it. And maybe God will help us. To feel it. The more we exercise it. And so pray. For love. And exercise. Love.

[19:06] Basically. Do those intentionally. Relational things. That might not come naturally to you. If you're. A westerner. Or. A guy. You know.

It's. It's often not. Easy. To be relational. And yet. If we're called to love. And God has saved us. To be people of love. That's something we've got to practice. Because love.

Believe it or not. Is essential. For a Christian. But there's one more thing. Paul prays. Because he knows. How much. This isolated. Thessalonian church needs it. And that is holiness.

It's the third thing he prays for. And it's. It's an unexpected one. Because I think. We often see holiness in our lives. The. The putting off of sin. And the development of good deeds.

And good works. And good living. I think we often see that as a nice to have. But not so much an essential. You know. After all. Jesus died for our sins. Right? And so technically.

[20:05] We don't need to pursue a holy knife. To be saved. Do we? You know. Isn't that right? Well. That's not quite how Paul sees it. Because look at what he prays.

In verse 13. He says. May he strengthen your heart. So that you will be blameless and holy. In the presence. Of our God and Father. When our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Now. He's actually quoting from a prophecy. In Zechariah. That Michiel read for us earlier. When Jesus returns. To this earth. And it will be an epic. And for many people.

A fearful. Day. Because he will return. To bring judgment. To those who have rebelled against God. And to save those who are waiting for him. But Paul assumes.

That while we are waiting. Those of us who are waiting for Jesus. Those of us who have. Bowed the knee. And submitted to him. As our king. And our savior. Paul assumes. That while we're waiting.

[21:02] We're going to be pursuing holiness. In preparation. For that day. And it's how we get ready. To see Jesus. You wouldn't. Meet the queen of England.

In a t-shirt. Right? Well. How much more. Must we make sure. We're dressed appropriately. When we see the Lord of glory. Well. You know what the dress code.

Will be to meet him. Holiness. As Hebrews. As Hebrews. Tells us. Without holiness. No one will see the Lord. And so yes.

While we're not saved. By holiness. We are certainly. Saved. For. Holiness. And so we need holiness. In our lives. We need to actively pursue holiness.

In our lives. Far more than we tend to think. And it's not a nice to have. It is an essential. In lockdown. As much as any other time. Yes. Work and school.

[21:56] Might be on hold. But our growth in holiness. Cannot be. And you never know. Maybe God is using the current situation. To increase. Our holiness. Maybe he's using the stresses.

And difficulties. Of lockdown. To make you. A more holy person. To expose. Sins. That you. Never realized. Because you're in that.

Sort of pressurized. Stressful. Position. Those sins. Maybe come out now. That you need to deal with. Or to purify you. Through trial. And the reason he.

He will do that. The reason he will put. Difficulties in our lives. To purify us. Is because his priority. For you now. If you're his child. Is not your comfort.

Like many. False. Prosperity gospel preachers. Will. Will wrongly teach. God's priority. For you now. In this age. Is not your comfort. It is your holiness.

[22:53] That's what he wants. For you. More than anything else. To be fit for his eternal kingdom. One day. And he is going to use. Anything in your life. To make sure that. He makes his covenant people.

Fit. For his eternal kingdom. Him. For his eternal kingdom.

