

## Prayer

Great and Mighty God, we love the world You have made; the truth of Your love which is there for all to discover, the beauty of creation in its finest detail and magnificent splendour, and the integrity of natural moral justice based on right and wrong which is woven into the fabric of Your world. May we treasure this world and journey within it with You according to Your will and purpose; in Jesus' name; AMEN.

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Faith's journey

*This week we will pray around the theme 'faith's journey'. Each of us are called to journey with the risen Lord through the life He has given. Pray for His leading throughout your life.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who face legal prosecution and are innocent*
- *Give thanks for the joys of family life and the glory of true love*
- *Pray for the concerns about pirates around the horn of Africa*

## Meditation

All around us, people mock religion and God:  
But You made everything, Lord God, You will not be mocked,  
And we delight in knowing You, despite what others may say.

All around us, people revel in sin and wickedness:  
But You have given us morals and the universal rules of life,  
So we rejoice in Your laws, because we are saved by faith!

All around us, our planet is stripped of its resources:  
But You hold its certain destiny in the palm of Your hand,  
And we, Your people, know that You will remake it all in glory.

All around us, the enemy draws people away from God:  
But You have authority over all evil in this world by Your Spirit,  
And we have the power in Christ, through the Gospel of Hope.

All around us there appears to be trouble and strife:  
But You have changed the whole world for ever, in Christ,  
And we are privileged to be agents of His truth and His love.

## Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

*<sup>17</sup> As for us, fellow believers, having been torn away from you for a brief time, in person not in heart, we strove more eagerly to see you face to face. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you; and certainly I, Paul, wanted to do so more than once, but Satan prevented us. <sup>19</sup> For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Yes, you are our glory and joy!*

## Review

Yesterday, we read about the contrast between the response of the Thessalonians to the Gospel, and the rejection of Jews who opposed Paul and created riots that led to his leaving the city (see Acts 17:6-9.). If we read this passage in Acts 17, we find that the newly converted Christians there helped Paul and his companions to move on quickly to Berea. However, having begun to preach at Thessalonica and received such a good response (Acts 17:3-6), it must have been something of a wrench to leave so quickly. All this clearly affected Paul and he felt he wanted to return to Thessalonica and see the young church there. He had only been there briefly, and had probably not spent much time teaching. He would have been concerned to make sure that the whole truth of the Gospel was declared, received and acted upon. Indeed, it is often reckoned that the letter to the Thessalonians was written only a short time later whilst Paul spent time in Corinth (see Acts 18), around 50 AD. Paul's memory of what had happened at Thessalonica was fresh, and he was unhappy at the way in which he had been 'torn' from the believers there (2:17).

### **The fellowship of the heart**

Our passage today speaks firstly about the fellowship of the heart, that spiritual sense of oneness that people experience when they feel that the truth of the Gospel is indeed held in common and without barriers. For many personal reasons, some of us get on well with each other, and some of us not so well. There are indeed personality differences within the church as well as outside, but within the church, we face the duty to accept one another even if we find it hard to get on well at a personal level. So when Paul wrote; 'we strove more eagerly to see you face to face ...' (2:17) such words would have sounded ridiculously hollow if they did not reflect a genuine desire of the heart that was not only expressed by Paul but accepted and received with good will by the Thessalonians.

### **Paul an evangelist for the people**

A true fellowship of the heart can be experienced however, when people know that there is unfinished Gospel work to be done, and this is what Paul alludes to here. The picture presented by our passage today is of Paul's sense of purpose as a missionary and the connection this had with real people. Paul dearly wanted to be with those he had seen earlier, so that he could complete the unfinished business of the Gospel. For him, the Gospel was not just a matter of preaching and speaking, of writing letters and making theological statements. It was a matter of relationships, and of sharing the things of God. So often within Paul's letters, we gain the impression of a man aloof from people, good at writing and telling people the truth even if they did not want to hear it (his first letter to the Corinthians being one example)! However, if we cast our eyes away from the well known highlights of his letters and look at the personal information they contain, we see a quite different picture. Paul appreciated being with people and he spent time with them explaining the Gospel. I strongly suspect that despite his reputation, Paul was an evangelist who was as good explaining things 'one to one' as he was preaching to a crowd. He clearly had deep friendships, and his model of leadership was like that of a companion more than a high-powered figure with a protecting entourage around him.

### **Greatest joys and greatest sorrows**

It is often true that our greatest joys and sorrows go together. In the last two verses of this text, Paul voiced the conviction that Satan was preventing him from seeing his friends in Thessalonica again. Paul does not explain this in detail because it was a spiritual judgement. He does not often speak of Satan, but if you look up all the references to 'Satan' in the letters of Paul, you will find that they all occur where Paul is speaking about the complexities of personal circumstances. Certainly, the impression gained is that Paul regarded Satan as active in the personal affairs of the Christian community; he was not some abstract theological entity added on to his explanation of the Gospel!

Paul then proceeded to move on beyond Satan's distractions, to glory in the good things God was doing in the midst of the difficulties. He spoke of his own sense of joy at the establishment of the church at Thessalonica (2:19,20). We might think that Paul spoke rather effusively, but with a little research, we can discover that Paul spoke similarly about other churches he founded (e.g. see 1 Cor 15:31, Phil 1:8). Paul probably felt deeply for all the churches he founded, and regarded them as his 'crown of rejoicing', the evidence of his evangelistic endeavours whilst doing the Lord's work.

Would that more of God's people were proud 'in the faith', to be people who had founded churches and preached the Gospel so that people were converted and changed for the better within the Kingdom of God. Would that more of God's people aspired to claim such crowns and join the heritage of those who have followed in Paul's footsteps, overcoming the obstinacy of Satan's challenge and continuing, whatever the odds, to preach the Gospel. For only the Gospel can change our world for the best.

## **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss examples in your group of the fellowship you enjoy with other Christians in doing the work of the Gospel.
2. In what ways does Satan interfere with people's lives to prevent Gospel work being done?
3. What scope is there for founding churches today? Is it right to found churches or to work within existing churches for the extension of God's Kingdom?

## **Discipleship**

### **Personal comment:**

*I have found tremendous fellowship with colleagues and friends at times when we have been able to do the work of the Gospel and complete some of the work required of us. I have also known the sense of frustration that can come over people when we cannot conclude what needs to be done, and people feel irritated at lack of progress. Sometimes, it is necessary to observe that 'Satan stands in the way' of some endeavour, and look for other ways of fulfilling the call placed on one's life, but this is hard to do. The greatest gift is to be able to do what Paul does here, which is to have confidence that the Lord will always have a way to fulfil His work, and live according to that confidence*

### **Ideas for discipleship programme**

- *Are there situations or people from your own past, which on reflection, cause you regret because of unfinished Christian or Gospel business? Has a door been closed on this issue by Satan, or is there a reason for you to follow through what was once so important? Pray about this.*
- *Pray against all the works of the enemy within the Christian church of which you are a part. You may not be able to see all that Satan does, but He will do His best to place barriers against the work of God's Kingdom and the Gospel.*

## **Final Prayer**

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the revelation of Your love in every part of life. Forgive us when we forget that You are there in everything we do, and help us to turn to You, as many times as is necessary, so that we may never reach the end of a day without having come to You in peace, accepting Your forgiveness. Thank You Lord Jesus: AMEN.