

1 Thessalonians 5 v 16-17 What is God's will for me in this....?

We are often exercised by wondering what God's will and purposes are for our lives – in decisions we need to make for the future, in more immediate perplexing circumstances or in troubled times like these.

- Well here is God's will for us at any time, described loud and clear for us in Paul's letter to believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17! It's an inescapable, all-the-time, 3 part command:

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

- Paul seems to anticipate our “what ifs” and “buts” by adding “in all circumstances” just to be clear there is no wriggle-room for any of us on this! When you're feeling sad and discouraged, fed up, anxious, angry, frustrated, acutely suffering or just feeling inexplicably low (you may be able to add in your own specific situation today) this verse might just seem an impossible ideal – something for those who are further up the scale in holiness. Something to admire and aspire to one day, but just not realistic right now. We might subconsciously re-write it like this – ***“Be joyful when things are going well; pray when I've got time and really desperate; give thanks when I've had a good day.”!***

- Wonderfully, God, in his goodness, doesn't give us a command he knows is beyond us or will not bless us as we obey it. We can do all these things – be joyful, pray and give thanks all the time - because of Jesus; we do it “in Christ Jesus”, because as believers we are “in” Him. If we've put our trust in Christ as our Saviour, then we've been inseparably and eternally united to Him. By faith we are united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. His death has paid for our sins, fully and finally, and we escape the awful punishment we deserved. Because of His resurrection, we have hope now and for the future, confident that we will one day be raised to live with Jesus for ever. **We can rejoice** that we are loved, chosen, and belong to Jesus now and forever.

- These truths aren't changed by the ups and downs of life, the many and varied trials we may go through – and remember Paul was writing to believers who had known severe trials of persecution and suffering and so he knew they needed these “solid joys and lasting treasure” (John Newton) to hold on to. And so do we. It means we can thank God at all times and in all things – **we can be thankful** for all that we have in Jesus, even as we still struggle or feel the pain of what might be happening to us at the time. And it enables us to see many things in those difficult situations to praise our loving God for and trust that He is working all things for our good.

- Remembering our precious relationship with Jesus will mean **we'll want to speak in prayer** to the One who loves us and gave himself for us, whenever we can – at set times and spontaneously throughout the day. These times of prayer will enable us to

express our joy, ask for his help and comfort in our need, and, as we see him answer our prayers, cause us to be thankful and joyful: it's a circular command!

- This verse sums up the life God wants us to enjoy and sent his Son to make it possible. A life full of knowing our loving heavenly Father, **rejoicing in him, praying to Him and thanking Him**. A life we want others to see and know for themselves too.

Find time today...

... **to rejoice** in the fact that you are chosen and loved by God, that he will keep you to the end, until you will be "with the Lord forever" (1 Thess 4:17) and let that fill you with a prayerful and thankful heart.

... to think about what **difference** this makes to a particular situation today. What are the "ifs" and "buts" that seem to make this verse impossible for you right now? How can you rejoice, pray and be thankful?

... to think about your current **prayer life**, what obstacles are there and how can you find ways to overcome them practically? (At a recent L@8 Zoom meeting some people shared places and times that helped them pray e.g. car journeys, hanging out the washing – sometimes we need to be creative!)

... to think **who you could pray for** – either a believer or unbeliever – that they would experience the difference belonging to Jesus makes in their situation.

May we all know today the joy expressed in this old chorus:

***“Joy floods my soul for Jesus has saved me,
Freed me from sin that long had enslaved me,
His precious blood He gave to redeem,
Now I belong to Him:***

***Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time along, but for eternity.”***

N.J. Clayton