

Advent 3
December 11, 2011

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
275-14-13-12

This Is God's Will for Our Advent Lives

- I. Be cheerful.
- II. Be careful.
- III. Be confident.

Dear Christian friends,

Just two more weeks until Christmas. Do you realize what ALL NEEDS to **still get done**? Perhaps it's finishing shopping or some LAST MINUTE baking. Maybe you've got your Christmas cards done but now you're getting some cards from people you had forgotten about. Now you have to get a QUICK CARD off to them too. And if you have children or grandchildren THROW INTO **the mix** their Christmas concerts and basketball games. DON'T FORGET the Advent service this week and the Christmas Eve services. MAYBE you're one whose health problems have **taken such a toll** that you can't do any of that anymore. So you sit at home DISCOURAGED – maybe even **depressed** about – what you can't all do anymore.

In all the hustle and bustle we today hear Paul GENTLY and QUIETLY say, ***"This is GOD'S will for you in Christ Jesus."*** Taking a break from all the **running around** let's look closer at GOD'S WILL FOR OUR ADVENT LIVES. **God's will** for our Advent lives is 1)be cheerful, 2)be careful and 3)be confident.

I. Be cheerful.

Just what is an "Advent life"? It's a life of waiting – **watching** – **preparing** – and waiting some more. It's living our DAY-TO-DAY lives with all their busyness – yet realizing that this busyness is really NOT WHAT LIFE is all about. We're waiting not just for Christmas but EVEN MORE so for Jesus to come again in glory and take us home to heaven. As we wait ***"this is God's will"*** for our Advent lives: ***"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances."*** God's will is that we BE CHEERFUL in our **Advent lives**.

"Be joyful always." The original Greek is even MORE EMPHATIC. It puts the ***"always"*** first so we don't miss God's point – "ALWAYS be rejoicing." Whoa! Wait a minute, Lord! We're living ADVENT lives – we're still waiting for **heaven's glory**. Our Advent lives now are NOT SO GLORIOUS. Come on, Lord, YOU KNOW what's going on. The economy stinks. The world's a mess. Our country is a mess. PROBLEMS – where should I start? With my health – the bills – the job? ***"Always rejoice"***?

"Always be rejoicing" just because we are living ADVENT lives. Yes, we're not in heaven YET – but that day is **soon coming**. We're not rejoicing in the OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES of our lives but in our God. ***"Rejoice IN THE LORD always,"*** is how Paul put it in Philipians. Or as he told the Romans, ***"Be joyful IN HOPE."*** Paul doesn't deny or downplay our problems. They're REAL – they HURT. Paul knew that from **personal experience**. But we have God's promise of Jesus' second coming – of eternal life in heaven. The best is STILL TO COME. I like the way Habakkuk put it. ***"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, (that's the picture of a farmer totally wiped out!) yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."***

“Pray continually” – or more literally, “WITHOUT INTERRUPTION be praying.” That’s another reason why we can **be cheerful** in our Advent lives. We certainly have plenty of things to pray FOR and ABOUT **as we wait** for Jesus. Instead of WRINGING our hands about how awful things are – **“take it TO THE LORD in prayer!”** **“Cast all your cares”** – all your worries – fears – **“anxieties”** – **“on Him, because He cares for you.”** What a blessing to be **able to go** to God in prayer – DUMP all our problems in His hands – put ourselves in His hands! – and confidently pray, “OK, Father, You handle this. You work it out.” And HAVING PUT it all **in God’s hands** – let’s be sure to leave it all in God’s hands!

“Give thanks in all circumstances.” Again, Paul isn’t denying or **downplaying** our problems. But EVEN IN THE MIDST of all our **pains** and **problems** we have so much to be thankful for. **We have** a loving heavenly Father who’s PROMISED to take care of us and work all things for our eternal good. **We have** a Savior who loves us SO MUCH that He even died on the cross to pay for all our sins – a Savior who’s washed us clean of all our sins in His own shed blood – who’s clothed us with His own perfect life – who’s promised us BOTH **“Lo, I am with you always”** and **“I give them (My sheep) eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand.”** Thank God that we are NOT LIVING or HANDLING our **Advent lives on our own!** THANK God for His love – His Word – His forgiveness – His promises – His **presence** – His **power**. Do YOU SEE what Paul’s been making the key to our being cheerful in our **Advent lives**? It’s STAYING FOCUSED on our God and His promises!

II. Be careful.

It’s dangerous living our **Advent lives**. The devil knows his time is short. AS God has revealed, **“Love is growing cold.”** Crime and violence – greed – selfishness – immorality are all **thriving**. False doctrine and false prophets are **flourishing**. **“If those days had not been cut short,”** Jesus said, **“no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”** It is God’s will that we BE CAREFUL in our **Advent lives**.

Paul explains. **“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.”** We had been **“dead in transgressions and sin.”** Through the gospel the Holy Spirit **“made us alive in Christ”** – He brought us to faith in Jesus as our Savior. It’s God’s will that our faith be a BLAZING BONFIRE not a **“smoldering wick.”** God doesn’t want us HIDING our faith but for our faith to shine brightly in these dark days for **others to see**.

HOW can we **“quench the Spirit’s fire”**? Just think of a **bonfire**. You can SMOTHER it by pouring water or shoveling dirt on it. A few drops of water – a few handfuls of dirt – won’t TOTALLY **extinguish** the fire – but it is dying out. EVENTUALLY with more and more dirt/water the fire will go totally out.

Do you see Paul’s picture? **Sin can smother** out our faith. It may not happen RIGHT AWAY – but as we grow comfortable with our sins – as we make excuses for our sins – tell ourselves this WON’T HURT us – **not** this ONE TIME – as we cuddle up to our sinful natures instead of **“denying”** ourselves – the DIRT is being piled deeper and deeper on our faith. **Sin** is taking over MORE AND MORE in our hearts and lives.

A second way to **put out** a fire is to NOT FEED – TEND – it. If you don’t keep putting more wood on the fire it will **die out**. If we don’t keep feeding our faith it will SLOWLY die out. That’s why church every week – those daily devotions at home **during the week** – why coming faithfully to Holy Communion are so ALL IMPORTANT. That’s why the devil TRIES SO HARD to knock God’s Word

out of our hands and heads and hearts. The SIMPLE GOSPEL message of Jesus is the food and fuel for our faith. By keeping us focused on Jesus and all He's done for us – by constantly taking us back to the **manger** – to Jesus' **bloody cross** and **empty grave** – THAT'S HOW the Spirit strengthens and keeps us in the faith.

Paul continues, ***“Do not treat prophecies with contempt.”*** Don't see church – devotions – Bible class – Sunday School as, “AW, come on! BORING!” BE CAREFUL that you never lose the thrill of **kneeling** at the manger – God's Son born our Brother, our Savior. **Be careful** that you don't tire of hearing how Jesus lived for you the perfect life you never could – hearing how Jesus died on the cross in your place to pay for all your sins – hearing how Jesus rose triumphant from the dead. **Be careful** that you never lose the thrill of HEARING of God's **love – forgiveness – promises** – the thrill of coming to Holy Communion.

“Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” We are to test “everything” AGAINST God's written Word. Is this what God REALLY SAYS? **Is this how God really wants** me to live my life? ***“Test everything”*** – what you believe – your morals and **values** and **priorities** in life – the language you use – ***“test”*** the music you listen to – the shows you watch – the places you go on the internet. ***“Test everything”*** and then BE SURE to act accordingly. If whatever PASSES God's test ***“hold on to it.”*** If whatever FAILS God's test ***“avoid”*** it – push it FAR AWAY from you.

We must be careful living our **Advent lives**. The devil is a **good liar**. The world can have SUCH A PULL on us. The sinful nature can be **so stubborn** and **strong**. How are we going to be able to SUCCESSFULLY LIVE our **Advent lives**? Don't despair. Don't give up. Indeed...

III. Be confident.

“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Notice who's doing ALL THE WORK – God! The word sanctify means to MAKE HOLY – to SET APART for God – for God's use and **glory**. God set us apart AS HIS OWN when He brought us to faith in Jesus as our Savior – when He forgave all our sins and made us His children. MORE AND MORE God is sanctifying us ***“through and through”*** – every part and area of our live. In our **Advent lives** we don't quit our jobs – we don't stop being a spouse – a parent – a child – a student – an employee, etc. God ***“sanctifies”*** EVEN THOSE parts of our lives as we now live as CHRISTIAN spouses – **Christian** parents, children, students, etc. THROUGH the gospel God brought us to faith – God is keeping us in the faith – God is helping us live our faith.

“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” Our confidence is NOT IN ourselves but in our God – our ever-faithful God. RIGHT NOW we must live our **Advent lives**. God's will is that we be cheerful – careful – confident. **Then when** Jesus FINALLY comes – as He will! – we will be found ***“blameless”*** and enter eternal life in His glorious presence. Amen.

APOSTLES' CREED