

**Sermon Notes of
Elder Larry Helscher's Sermon on November 29 2020:**

**"Where shall We Go? What Shall We Do?
(1 Thessalonians 5:12-23)"**

First Sunday of Advent – Hope

[In today's sermon, Elder Larry Helscher on Zoom shows us from Paul's letter to the Thessalonica church that we all need to display these various Christian virtues in our lives.]

Introduction:

- There is a lot of uncertainty in our current year of 2020.
- There is also distrust in some of our major institutions this year as well.
- So, what should we do?

- In John 6, we find that Jesus was teaching some heavy spiritual things about eating His flesh and drinking His blood which caused some of his followers to go away and leave him.
- And Jesus asked Peter, "Will you too go away?"

John 6:68, Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

- Where do we go?
 - We go with the word of God, which are the scriptures and we also go to the Word of God, which is Jesus.
- What do we do?
 - This short story will help us.
 - There was a deacon in a congregation who talked with his pastor.
 - It seems that every Saturday, Jehovah Witnesses would come to his door at home.
 - He told his pastor, "I kind of frustrated, I don't know what to tell them. Do you have any suggestions?"
 - He said, "They don't believe in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. So, you could tell them they could come in after they recite the Pledge of Allegiance."

 - Sure enough, a lady came to his front door and he told her that she could come in and he would listen to what she had to say after she recited the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - So she came in and slowly recited the Pledge of Allegiance and then said, "I've been selling Avon products now for 15 years, but this is the first time that I've been asked to recite the Pledge of Allegiance."

 - Now there are a number of lessons we can learn from this story.
 - And one of them is that we can get so focused on our own interpretation of things that we don't focus on the right thing or we don't see the big picture of what's really going on.

- So, again, what do we do?
 - Now, in this crazy year, a lot of people have moved away.
 - When you move, you usually trade your current problems for a new set of problems. So that's not the answer.
- So, what we do is to teach others by example and by the Word.

Today's scripture is 1 Thessalonians 5:12-23 (New Living Translation):

1 Thessalonians 5:12 (NLT), Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. 13) Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.

14) Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. 15) See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.

16) Always be joyful. 17) Never stop praying. 18) Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. 19) Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.

20) Do not scoff at prophecies, 21) but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. 22) Stay away from every kind of evil. 23) Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again

Thessalonica church background:

- The Thessalonica church was basically Gentile with a few Jews.
- Now, Thessalonica was a city Macedonia, which is in northern Greece.
- It had a 100,000 people, which in those days was quite a sizable city.
- It was the capital of Macedonia and was also a harbor city.
- And it was the cross road of 2 major trading routes.
- However, the church at Thessalonica was only 2 to 3 years old.
- Now at this time there were many persecutions of Christians such as beatings, stonings even crucifixions.
- Now the emphasis of this letter was the return of Jesus.
- So, we need to understand what these verses meant to them and what they mean to us now, because they contain a sizable virtue list of Christian values.

There are three approaches to these verses:

- One is for correction.
- Another is for self-examination, which is really between you and God.
- And the 3rd approach is the way Paul used them – “To encourage each other and to build each other up just as you are already doing” which he wrote in verse 11.
- We can also be examples to younger people such as our children, grandchildren and other young people we meet.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 (NLT), Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. 13) Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work.

- There should be a good relationship of grace and love between ministry and laity, which is guided by the Holy Spirit.
- Be at peace as Romans 12:18 tells us. **Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.**

13b) And live peacefully with each other.

- Now there are some people who are antagonistic by nature and don't live peaceably with others.
- The Holy Spirit gives us the opportunity to show to our family members and others a peaceful approach to things and not being antagonistic or belligerent.

14) Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy.

- How many of us remember this statement that President John F. Kennedy said; "Ask not what your country can do for you, but rather ask, 'what can you do for your country?'"
- However, a few years later, some unfortunate social engineering actually encouraged laziness and got people dependent upon the government for their living.
- Now, the Thessalonian church had three main problems.
- First, the members expect Jesus to return in their lifetime.
- So, some said, "What's the use of working? I'll just wait for Jesus to return."
- The second problem was that some of the members depended upon the wealthier members of the congregation to sustain them.
- And the third problem was that there was a cultural attitude among Greeks that manual labor was beneath them.
- Unfortunately today, some people also have attitudes like that.
- Starr Parker is a good example of this, which has a happy ending.
- She was a young woman, who was on welfare.
- She said, "I've got a government check coming in twice a month, so why should I work?"
- And then, some of her lady friends took her to church, where she had never been before.
- There, she was told that God was not pleased with her life style; and at that moment God started working with her and moved her to get an education.
- She was then guided to start a business as a motivational speaker and writer.
- So, she was inspired to make a success of her life.

14b) Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

- Sometimes, it's hard to tell if someone is timid or just lazy.
- So, we need to encourage others and invite them in to work alongside us.
- And as we do this and other things with people, we need to be patient and give tender care to others.

15) See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.

- Revenge never accomplishes anything – it just brings more retribution as we see in history.
- So, as a Christian, we are not to retaliate to others, but to do good to all people.

16) Always be joyful. 17) Never stop praying. 18) Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

- Jesus is in the center of all these virtues.
- You will never see a joyful person who is always griping and unthankful? NO.
- These attitudes don't go together at all. They are opposites.
- Now, at Thanksgiving, which was just a few days ago, people often go around the dinner table and ask everyone to say what they are thankful for.
- This was in the November partner letter from Plain Truth Ministries about what people are most thankful for:
 1. For God
 2. For family and friends
 3. For health
 4. For freedom, safety and security
 5. For other people who make life worth living
 6. For God and people who love me and forgive me
 7. And for the various material possessions like houses and cars, money and bank accounts, devices and conveniences.
- And then this letter goes on to say that those who live in places other than the advantaged countries like the United States, Canada, the UK and Europe, who live in the second and third world countries are thankful for:
 1. For a place to lay my head each night.
 2. For just waking up one more day and having food to eat.
 3. For one more day without bombs going off.
 4. For clean water to drink and clean air to breathe.
 5. For access to medicines and clinics.
 6. For just having any job, even one I don't really like.
 7. For breathtaking sunsets.

19) Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.

- A lot of translations say "quench" instead of "stifle" which are similar in meaning.
- By doing this, we would be ignoring the various spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gives to us.
- Now, we all been given various spiritual gifts.

- These are excerpts from an article from “Focus on the Family”:
 - There is a man named Morgan Weistling, who started doing art work as a 2 year old, probably because his parents were artists, as well.
 - He began his professional career at age 19 and became a much sought after movie poster illustrator.
 - One day, sitting in the church pew, Morgan heard something that made him rethink his purpose.
 - He felt that he was wasting his time with the talent that the Creator had given him.
 - When the church gave an altar call, he felt that he needed to give his life and heart to God to let Him use my talents.
 - So, he responded to the altar call and received Christ.
 - The very next day, someone from Focus on the Family called because the ministry was looking for someone to illustrate for them.
 - This was new beginning that fulfilled his purpose.
 - He also began to do illustrations for numerous faith-based companies.
 - He began painting imagers of Christ and the life of Christ.
- This is an interesting story about not ignoring our spiritual gifts because we all have them.
- Younger people can be encouraged by us showing our spiritual gifts either by our example or by our actions.
- We also need to encourage young people to find out their spiritual gifts and talents and use them.

20) Do not scoff at prophecies, 21) but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.

- Thanks to pastor Craig, we have been given a good background in Trinitarian theology.
- Now, our denomination isn't perfect, but we have a great foundation and have learned many wonderful things as we've moved from law to grace.
- Now, there are many ministries in today's society and we have to evaluate them because they all have some good.
- So, we need to use the Holy Spirit to help us discern what is proper and good.
- In this way, we test all teaching.

22) Stay away from every kind of evil.

- Elder Larry doesn't have to tell us what is evil – all we have to do is watch the news to see the evil that is out there in our world.
- When we stay away from every kind of evil, we will be setting an example for others.

23) Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

- Again, our hope is in Jesus appearing in power, which is His second coming.

- Isaiah 45 tells us that when Jesus returns every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

Concluding comments:

- This is our hope and it starts with Jesus' incarnation, which this season reflects.
- So, we can be encouraged that we are doing these things in our lives from this virtue list with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Closing prayer:

Communion: (Fred Stevens)

- As you can see, we have the Advent candle with the bread and wine on display here.
- Now, Jesus told us to partake of the bread and wine in remembrance of Him.
- So, let's take this bread and remember what happened to Jesus.
- In reality, we are sitting right there at that table with the disciples and with Jesus.
- And He tells us to take this bread because this is His body.

- So, let's think about what happened to His body.
- The next day His body was beaten, mangled, tortured and then his body went into the grave.
- But in a few days, the disciples saw His body transformed – they touched him – He ate with them.
- It's truly amazing what happened to His body at the resurrection.
- His body was transformed into something new and something different and something future.

- Likewise, Jesus said to drink the cup and His emphasis there was to let everybody drink it, because it represents His blood.
- And what happened to His blood?
- It cleanses each of us from our sins, and it also cleanses everything from sin.
- Jesus' blood gave a cleansing and transformation of everything.

- In Romans 8, Paul says that the whole creation groans, like in child birth, for that transformation that's coming.
- It's so interesting that Jesus was born of a virgin womb and was also born again out of a virgin tomb, as well.
- Jesus emerged as a new person and then went on ahead of us into the future that awaits us.

- Jesus is our hope just as these elements represent our hope, as well.
- So, let's take this bread and this cup, thanking You God for it and praising You for the hope You have given us.