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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5
Title of Sermon: Anchored by our Prayers
Series: Living in the Light of His Coming - #4

3 As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. **2** And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. **3** But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. **4** We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. **5** May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

We're continuing in this series. Paul's addressing this question, wrestling with this issue. This frightened group of people thought the return of Christ had already occurred and that they were not going to endure these evil end times, and he assured them, "No -- two huge issues need to occur -- the rebellion and the man of lawlessness, but as you anticipate this coming, as you anticipate the birth pangs" -- as he, Paul, has begun to commentate, if you will, on that message of Christ there in Matthew 24 -- "and these things increasingly get bad, you're going to need to be anchored." And we've talked about three things: Anchored in the truth of God's Word, anchored in the love of God, and today, we want to talk about a third anchor. Anchored in prayer.

One of the guys that I first kind of began to become -- oh, just enamored with when I was a young man, was E.V. Hill. E.V. Hill was a black pastor who was in LA when I encountered him. He was the pastor of Zion Missionary Baptist Church, and his story, if you could ever find it -- I have it on a cassette player; that'll date me a little bit -- but E.V. had this marvelous testimony of going to Zion Missionary Baptist Church years ago, when it took police officers every Sunday just to keep order in this church. And he went there, and he began to preach the gospel. Where I heard E.V. talk about this was at a conference on biblical inerrancy in San Diego, 1980 was the year. Probably the most impactful message -- you can find this one on YouTube -- is E.V.'s message that he gave at his wife's funeral. One of the most remarkable messages I've ever heard. But when E.V. was speaking back in 1980, when I first encountered him, he was talking about the power of God's Word to change a person in society. He was talking about the characteristics of the Word of God, that it was living and it was active. He talked about the power of God's Word, and he talked about the ability of God's Word in a congregation presuming that the man of God who was preaching was preaching the Word of God. And so, in this message -- I'll never forget -- he prayed. He goes, one of the most important prayers that you need to pray was this -- pray that God would tack your pastor's head to the wisdom post.

Now, at 18 years of age, listening to that dear black brother preach, that was just good preaching -- creative, and I hadn't heard that prayer. Pray that God would tack your pastor's head to the wisdom post. Why? Because from E.V.'s perspective, if you preach from anything other than God's Word, you're leading your people down a path of secular humanity. Pray that God would tack your pastor's head to the wisdom post. Now, this may be terribly obvious for you, but at 18 years of age, I was profoundly shocked. My first reality was that I'd never prayed for my pastor. Why, because I didn't like him? No, I loved him! Played racquetball with him every week. He's a great guy! Pray for him? Why would I pray for him? He's godly! I wasn't! He's really smart -- I wasn't. He mowed his lawn in a white shirt with a tie. I didn't! I mean, this guy was holy! It never really even hit me square-up. I couldn't imagine -- pray for my pastor? I mean, the guy's amazing! I didn't think he needed it.

And the second thing that shocked me is what to pray for. That he would not be tempted to live out of his own wisdom, that he would not be tempted to preach anything other than the Word of God. I left that day a very changed 18-year-old -- as much as an 18-year-old can be changed, I was on that day. I was. I was profoundly changed, because from that day on, I prayed for my pastor. And by the way, I told him. And I told him that I was going to pray that God would tack his head to the wisdom post. He

didn't really like that imagery, but that's all right. I loved him. I changed that day. It was profound, to be quite honest with you. I changed from a person who sat in a chair and listened to my pastor to a partner with this person's life. I now went with him. There were times I did. I did a lot of worship leading, a lot of music, and so, Pastor Kay, when he would go and he would be invited to speak sometimes, he would drag me along and throw me up there to lead the music, and then he would preach. But that was not the partnership that I joined on that day. It was a partnership of praying for that man, believing that I expanded his life. I touched it.

For years I credited E.V. Hill with that great insight, until I ran into this passage, when I realized that E.V. was borrowing somebody else's good stuff. He was simply doing what he told us to do. Tack your head to the wisdom post. And in this text, Paul -- now, just remind yourself for a moment who Paul is. Paul, an apostle of Christ. Paul, a man gifted with faith beyond anything I've ever imagined, or, frankly, even anticipate. I don't ever imagine that if somebody comes up and touches -- just touches my shirt -- that they might be healed. I seriously don't live everyday with the idea that I'm going to go pray over some little boy that falls out of a window and resurrect him from the dead. I don't think that way. If that happens, glory to God! I'm running over to the hospital. But this is Paul, the writer of two-thirds of the New Testament under the inspiration of God, and Paul is the one who says to these dear brothers, "Finally, brothers, pray for us." Stop for a moment. Just let that sink in. Paul. Supernaturally gifted. Since when does Paul need anyone's prayers? Why would Paul need prayers? He cast demons out of people. He raised the dead! He healed the sick. One can only imagine that if Paul needed the partnership of prayer, all of us in this room do. You see, Paul had a conviction, and that is that missions is a team sport. And if you don't get that, you're gonna have a reduced impact in this world. But if you get it, it's gonna change your life. It will. Like it did to me on that day. You might be one of those individuals that you've never prayed for your pastor, you've never prayed for a missionary. You've never really brought them before the throne of grace because you thought like I did! That person's holy! Who am I? Well, let me inspire you -- everyone needs partners. Because we're going to be anchored together in prayer.

What does Paul teach us? He teaches us about the partnership of prayer. He teaches us, he says, "Finally, brothers, I want you to pray for us that the message of the Lord may run rapid." Pray. We don't really know how much our prayers make a difference. We don't. It's probably a good thing. We don't know how many more people get saved as an evangelist preaches if we join. We don't know exactly how much more effective a missionary's going to be in the field that we send them if we pray for them. We don't know if their malaria is going to be shortened, we don't know if their fevers are going to be reduced, we don't know if the extent of the COVID damage is going to be restricted -- we don't know any of that! What we do know is, the man who healed people in Jesus' name said, "Pray for me." His conviction is that the strongest man in Zion, filled with the greatest faith in the world, will be better if the weakest person's faith in Zion joins him. Paul's conviction is this -- the strongest man in Zion, the man with the greatest faith, is going to be better, if the weakest person of faith in Zion prays for him. What are the implications? There are two, at least that I can think of. Number one is, the expanse of a person's impact. A missionary, a pastor -- your life. The expanse of a person's impact grows when they are partnered with praying people. Friends, we encourage people when they go on a short-term mission trip to get people to pray for you. We don't do that just because we want it to be a religious experience. We do that because we want their life to make a difference. Missionaries garner together, not just a financial support team, but a prayer team, and they do that for good reason. I hope it's not just to look spiritual. I don't think that it is. I think it's because they believe in this conviction that the expanse of a person's impact grows when they're partnered with praying people. Paul understood that, "If I go out -- and I will go out" -- Paul was -- "I'm a missionary to the gentiles, and I'll throw in a few Jews, and I'll get anyone else that comes along" -- but he understood that the capacity for my gospel message to be at its highest impact and greatest, greatest strength is going to take all of us.

You say why? Does God work on this level of scale, you know, where the more people who pray, God -- well, that's pretty heavy. That's pretty heavy. No, I want to offer just two thoughts on this. Why does it matter that more people pray? Number one -- I would suggest that God loves faith. And when He has greater faith, He loves it even more. God loves faith. Absolutely. He tells us in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6. God is pleased with faith. He loves it. So, when He sees more faith, it pleases Him. Secondly, I would suggest that God also loves unity. There's a place of commanded blessing, the Scripture says. A place

where brethren dwell in unity. Let me rephrase it -- God says, "When I see unity in the church, I obligate my blessing. When I see unity in a marriage, I obligate my blessing." The reverse is also true, my friends. If that's the case, then the expanse of a person's impact, the expanse of a church is going to grow when we're partnered with praying people. If you're a cynic over the years, you've heard a lot of people kind of mock, you know, church prayer chains. At least, in my 36 years I've heard a whole lot of people mock church prayer chains. "Oh, they're nothing but gossip trains." Maybe. Maybe these little church prayer chains that we've made so much fun of actually change the world. Maybe the fact that you'd get yourself on an email list and you would pray, and -- we have a dear brother, Sam, who's up in the hospital right now, fighting for his life. And maybe the fact that if we all got together, and we unified our hearts, and we poured our faith together -- you see, God did say, "If my people which are called by my name will humble themselves." He didn't say, "If a few of you -- you know, just give me one!" No -- one person can change the world. It's true. John Wesley said, "Give me ten people who hate nothing but sin and love nothing but Jesus, and I'll take England." But the reality is, Paul is, I think, giving us a principle. And it's this -- that the expanse of a person's impact grows when they're partnered with praying people. It's inspired me this week, candidly. That I want to move to an even greater commitment to every one of our missionaries, that we will do more than just fund you. We will throw our weight with you and expand your ministry.

There's a second principle -- and this one's for you. The power and impact of your life expands when you partner with gospel-centric people. You call your small group. "Hey, I'm going over to talk to my father. He's in the hospital. My father doesn't know the Lord. And would you pray?" That's a wise move, my friends. It is! Could you go alone? Yes! Are you powerful alone? Yes! Are you more powerful with a group of gospel-centric people behind you praying? Yes! Yes. And so, therefore, take the time, be the kind of person that garners together. Paul did. "Finally, brothers, pray for us. We're going into a battle." And he's gonna tell us in a minute what to pray for, but the very fact that he does that tells us that if I want my life to have a greater impact, then I'm going to take the time to partner with gospel-centric people. If I want to expand my touch, if I want to expand the power of the gospel that I preach, if I want to see greater doors opened, then my friends, partner with gospel-centric people.

A number of years ago, Henry Blackaby came out with a book called *Experiencing God*. It's a good book. But one of the principles I remember, and he talked about the prevenient work of God's grace and the prevenient work of God, and he said that if you want to get in on what God is doing, you find out where God is working and you get in on that, and so, a lot of people, like Oh Man, a lot of people -- I think, abusively, said, "Oh, God is really working in this church. Let's go there." And sadly, in those years of the eighties, there were a whole lot of churches where people are like, "Oh, God's not working here, so I'm leaving." I don't think that's what Blackaby meant. And I'm not so sure, to be honest with you, now, 40 some years later, than I actually really buy off on that idea. If you want to get in on what God -- you know, or find out where God's working, then get it on it. Well -- I'm not so sure Paul kind of fit that philosophy. I think his philosophy is: "Here's where I'm headed. Pray for a mighty movement of God to break out. Here's where I'm headed -- I'm going to Asia. Here's where I'm headed -- I'm gonna head to Rome. Here's where I'm headed -- I'm going to Ephesus." He'd already set out his agenda. "I'm gonna go to places where the gospel's never been preached. I'm gonna go to places where it is kind of a central or cultural-centric place that influences other businesses and places. I'm gonna go to a place and I'm gonna preach the gospel, and I'm gonna probably get kicked out of the temple, and then I'm gonna go to houses of prayer, and I'm gonna garner together a group of people, I'm gonna lead them to Christ, I'm gonna appoint elders and I'm gonna go." He had his strategy. What he was saying is -- "Hey, would you come join me, because when you pray with me -- when I go to Thessalonica, we're gonna make a bigger splash." It really is a different philosophy. It's not, "I'm gonna go where God's doing a great work." Remember Paul's philosophy -- "I'm gonna go where God's not doing anything. And by His grace, we're gonna make something happen."

My friends, that's a significantly different flip. And I like Paul. A number of years ago when I was with the Navigator program, I had a situation I needed to attend to and I couldn't attend one of the outreaches that we were doing. When it came back, when the team came back, I'll never forget -- they were telling me all about the incredible work that God did on this trip, and I was really feeling kind of outside the loop and sad. The leader, a godly, godly man -- Gary Stratton -- came up to me, and he says, "Mark, did you

pray for our team?" I said, "Absolutely, I did." And he said, "Then don't feel on the outside. You're as much a part of our success as we were." I'll never forget that. Gary believed what this text says. That the power and the impact of my life expands when I partner with gospel-centric people.

The partnership of prayer leads to the focus of prayer. What does he pray for? Two things, Paul says. Number one, I want you to pray for our message. I want you to pray for the message. What -- Paul, you unclear about the message? No. He's not. He knows the message; he knows the gospel. He gave it to us. It's right there in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, it's real clear. He knows exactly what he's going to teach, but he tells them, "I want you to pray for the message. I want you to pray that it would be delivered. I want you to pray that it would be honored. I want you to pray that it would spread rapidly, like a wildfire." And by the way, Paul believed that if you didn't pray, that it wouldn't spread rapidly and it wouldn't be honored. I take Paul very simply for what he said. He said, "I want you to pray for God's message. I want you to pray that the gospel would run and it would transform people's lives. I want you to pray for creative measures for the gospel to get out. I want you to pray that God would give us creative means that we would go to the right places, that we would connect with the right people." I was reading of a situation that's happening in Southeast Asia, and a group of leaders have installed some hubs that enable some internet connections to happen. And one of the things in this area is, deaf people are completely forgotten -- fundamentally seen in this region as people who are deaf because they've sinned in a previous life. And so, this ministry has discovered a way to reach them. And the gospel is spreading in this Southeast Asian area in a way, it's like a revival to deaf people. This week, we're going to do crazy, fun things, like an illusionist is going to train some kids in illusion, and then, woodworking, and -- there's going to be -- I don't know all of the different disciplines, but I am so proud of our children's ministry leadership team, because God has given them such a creativity and such a passion. And I want you to pray that the gospel would run rampant this week and it would be honored by the students, and it would be honored by the parents. And Paul believed that if you do, it'll change things.

He said, secondly, "I want you to pray for the messenger." Why? He says, "And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith." That may be the understatement of the century. And who's he talking about? He's talking about people who are threatened by the gospel. He's talking about people who saw the way -- as it was originally called -- or Christianity, as a threat to the Roman empire. He's talking about people who had a certain set of religious expectations, and Paul was blowing them all out. And rather than just entertain Paul and listen to him, and let him go on his way, they tried to kill him, and they created riots. Read about it in Acts 19. And they did everything they could, and much like Jesus' life, Paul oftentimes had to be whisked away. But Paul was of the mind that, "It doesn't matter if they're going to threaten my life -- I'm gonna preach the gospel." But pray that we would discern, be protected from. Have wisdom.

We need to pray the same today. We need to pray for our friends up in Canada. I don't know if you're keeping abreast of what they're doing up there, but they're torching churches all the way across Canada. There are multiple ones. I've lost track. I think it's above a dozen. And they're burning them and burning them and burning them. Pastors are going to jail. Let's move out of Canada and go down into Columbia and go down into Venezuela, the same thing. Let's go to Haiti and the churches now are being threatened along with the president having been assassinated. You see, my friends, I'm going to go home tonight, and -- there's really not much that's going to threaten me, other than the fact that my back hurts and I wake up in the middle of the night. But I've got dear brothers all over the world, and you do too. And Paul says, "Pray for them. Pray for those who will be proclaiming the gospel." There's a missionary who talked about a young man by the name of Mob (ph.). He's in Cambodia. He was the only person in his family who had ever come to Christ, and he came home one day and he could feel the evil presence in his home, and so, he was praying that God would break the evil presence in his home. When he was praying, a shelf fell, and one of the family idols fell off of the shelf and shattered. Just this last year. Yang, his dad, came to him and said, "What have you done? You have destroyed my god! I have no god to believe in and I won't believe in yours." Mob left, and all he could hear was the hatred of his dad. His dad was going blind, and so Mob gathered with some of the missionaries and asked if they could help, and they got him to a surgeon. And they did a simple cataract surgery, and he could see. He began to read the Bible. And the very man who said, "You have destroyed my god"

found the true God. See, Paul believed it takes a team to fulfill the mission. Yang was an evidence of the same. It took a son who had courage, missionaries who were willing to risk, a doctor who was willing to do the surgery, people who were willing to fund the surgery. And a man could see, and he read the scriptures.

Pray for God's messengers. Pray for people who today work in environments where they're asked to accept, believe, and communicate things that are not true and in alignment with the scriptures, and their jobs are on the line. Pray for people who are going to go home, and when they enter into their home, because there is evil in those homes, and sometimes it's parents and sometimes it's a spouse, and they walk into that house, and it's an evil home, it's a wicked home. There are demonic powers in that home. And they don't have the option to just go somewhere else. That's where God called them. Like, might be a dad. It could be a son. Paul says, "Pray, because missions is a team sport." But we pray with an assurance. We don't pray wondering if God hears us. We don't pray wondering if God's gonna listen. But we pray -- pray that we will be delivered from these wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. Ah, but he says, "But the Lord is faithful. And He will strengthen and He will protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the very thing we ask. Pray." What was his confidence? Number one, God, you're faithful and you will act. He believed with all of his heart that if you pray, God listens and He will act. He will defend you. Does that mean every Christian's gonna live? No. Does that mean that every person's gonna be ultimately protected? No, sin has entered into this world. But it does mean that the Word of God is going to be protected. It does mean that the church will advance. It does mean that the gospel will have impact and power. And it does mean that God will intervene wondrously and gloriously in your life. God is faithful, and He will act, and He's powerful, and He will sustain. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

Why did Paul ask them to pray? Because he wanted to endure, and he knew that if they prayed, he would. Why did he ask them to pray? Because he wanted to be effective, and he knew if they prayed, he would be more effective. Why did he ask them to pray? Because Paul was going to face evil. Personified in people. The manifestations of hell on earth. And he knew that if he prayed, we're going to overcome those things together. That's why he said, "My friends, missions are a team sport." It really is.

There's a location down in Sacramento. If you've ever been down there, you know the Detroit Boulevard neighborhood. It's a mess. Kind of like downtown Portland. People didn't want to live there. They were vacating as fast as they could. The churches were all dying down there. If you wanted to have a big church, you went out to the suburbs. We've seen that across the board, haven't we? That's why being a downtown church is one of the greatest challenges you can ever accept. It's just a lot easier out on the outskirts. In this Detroit Boulevard neighborhood, it was filled -- virtually every other house seemed to be a drug house. And there was a group of people -- I guess you would have to say they'd had enough. That's usually what it takes. Like a church to say, "We're saying." Like a church to say, "We're not moving." Like a church to say, "We're gonna make a difference." One of the police officers led a group of people -- there happened to be only eight people, and they began to prayer-walk the very neighborhood that was the most dangerous. "God, would you make the gospel effective. God, would you expand the power of your name. God, would you help us to defeat evil." One by one, they discovered these drug houses closing up. Some of them burning. A couple of years later, a local newspaper, the Sacramento Bee, reported that there were no homicides, robberies, or sex crimes and only one assault in the Detroit Boulevard in three years. Why? Eight people led to 16. Sixteen led to 32. Thirty-two planted a church, and where did they put it? Right in the middle of Detroit Boulevard in Sacramento, California. In three years, the Sacramento Bee reported the findings of a question -- does it make a difference when God's people pray? And the answer is -- yes. Missions is a team sport, and my friends, when you partner with gospel-centric people, you expand their impact, and when you partner with a gospel-centered church, you change the city where it lives.

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