

[Day #15] An Argument from Silence: The Un-Prayer

Read: 1 Thess. 3:3-4; Acts 9:16

From the first, Paul was destined for suffering; and suffer he did. Everywhere he went, he and his message brewed up trouble.

The most despicable troublemakers were the Thessalonians – not the common people, but the leaders. Paul's initial ministry there was going along just fine. It was only when amazing things started happening – when the power of the gospel was unleashed and people responded – that trouble started.

The Jews become jealous when they see people accepting Paul's message, so they go to the market place and round up unsavory characters and start a riot. Unable to locate Paul, they grab some innocents and have them arrested. That night, under the cloak of darkness, the brothers send Paul on to the next town.

Fifty miles later, Paul is teaching in the next town, Berea, and God is once again blessing his message with great fruit.

Now things get even uglier.

Back in Thessalonica, the haters hear that Paul's message is having success in Berea. Once again they round up their rabble-rousers and send them off to destroy Paul's work there, too! These jealous leaders were just like those Jesus warned, saying, "Woe to you, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to." (Matthew 23:13-14) They were really bad guys. Wolves!

In perfect contrast to these bad Thessalonians were the good Thessalonians. This church was so obedient, the only exhortation Paul could conjure up was to tell them to just "*keep doing what you are doing, and do it more and more.*" They were really good people.

Knowing there were ravenous wolves living among his precious Thessalonian "sheep," Paul's prayers were extra-fervent. It's exactly here where the insight on prayer for suffering people is gained, not just in what Paul prayed for them, but especially in what he did NOT pray. He does not pray that they will be *spared* persecution, but that they would *not be shaken* by it. Finally, Timothy comes with a positive report after which Paul writes, "You yourselves know that we are appointed to...suffer tribulation. Now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 3:4, 8)

Certainly it isn't wrong to pray that our loved ones be spared trouble. The point here is simply that this was not Paul's first reflex as he prayed for his friends in trying circumstances; and this silence says a lot.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can the way Paul prayed for his Thessalonian friends be explained? How might it instruct us in praying for persecuted believers?

Amazingly, even today church leaders in China and other places often say, “Do not pray that the persecution stops.” Why would they say this?

Do you know someone who is being persecuted for his or her faith? Take time now to pray for that person or group in a way that is consistent with how Paul prayed for persecuted believers.

If you don't know believers being persecuted for their faith, find a story at Voice of the Martyrs (www.persecution.com) or Open Doors (www.opendoors.org) websites.