Raoul Gérard was a name I had not come across until yesterday - but I am in no doubt that this man was passionate about 2 things, military history and small lead figures. How do I know this? Well because yesterday we visited the military museum in Morges, and the first room you enter displays 10 000 of these figures that M. Gérard researched and made during his lifetime. Apparently his collection actually totalled 180 000, although only 40 000 have survived to this day. His passion for military history and small lead figures is pretty clear!

As we have been working our way through this letter, it is just as hard to miss Paul's passion for these new believers in Thessalonica
Again and again Paul addresses them as 'brothers and sisters in Christ' - a phrase he uses14 times in this letter!!
And if you were with us last week, we saw how Paul is so concerned about the Thessalonians, that he sends his good friend Timothy to find out how they were getting on - because his not knowing had become unbearable
… if Paul did not love them as brothers and sisters in Christ he would not care about how they were getting on - but he does love them and so he does care
and so he sends Timothy… and then has to wait for him to return

Many of us… most of us will be able to recall a time when we were desperately waiting for some news - a letter perhaps, or an email, or a phone call…
- perhaps about the health of a friend, or the birth of a child
- the results of an operation or an exam
- whether we have a place at university
- or a job application has been successful

… and the waiting can be unbearable… of course these days.. news travels much faster than it did back in Paul's day, 2000 years ago
The journey time from Corinth, where Paul and Timothy were, to Thessalonica took about a 7 days - so Paul would have had to wait at least 2 weeks
… but today we find out!… For Timothy has returned with his report
And I think we can learn 2 things from Paul's response, as to what it means to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ

#1 - Paul rejoices in and thanks God for the faith and love of other believers

It's pretty clear isn't it, that having heard from Timothy that the Thessalonians are doing well - "standing fast in the Lord"… that Paul is delighted!
… he describes it as "good news" there in v6!

not *"good news, its stopped raining*"… or "*good news, i've finished the washing-up"*
but good news - as in *"great news, amazing news, shout it from the roof tops… news"*

Why do I say that?
… well it's because the word translated 'good news' is the word we usually translate "gospel" - and here is the only time Paul uses it, to refer to something, other than the good news about Jesus Christ
and so if Paul compares hearing about them… about v6- their faithfulness in how they live, and their love for others…
as well as their continued affection for Paul, and desire to see him again
… rather than thinking "*he did a runner, he's a deserter, he doesn't care about us*"
And here's the thing: if Paul compares the good news of Timothy's report
… to **THE** GOOD NEWS, about how Jesus Christ died to save us because we could not save ourselves
… then he considers their standing firm in the faith as really very good news indeed!
which is why he is both delighted and comforted (v7)… strengthened

But his delight and comfort is not because Paul is concerned about his reputation?… about leaving a good impression?
… he is comforted by news **of** them… because his concern is ***for them***!
… again we see just how much Paul cares for them… how he is so "*other person-centred"* that ***his*** wellbeing is tied up with ***their*** well-being…
… Paul's life is so bound up with theirs - that news that they are standing firm brings him great joy amidst his distress…

And then there in verse 8 - when he says "*now we live*" it is the sense of having been holding one's breath for ages - but now being able to breathe again!

Now his response may seem a bit surprising until we recall that Paul cares for these guys like a parent. He has already likened his care for them to a father and a mother…

It was a wet Monday morning in late August… when we set out as a family for a walk… it was the kids first day of school here in Switzerland…
things didn't quite go according to plan, in that we ended up putting T on a school bus anything but convinced that it was the right bus
… and as the morning went on… the 'not-knowing' if he had made it safely became unbearable
… we could not rest until we knew he was ok
… and when we found out he was ok - then we were ok

Was I bothered about whether the other kids made it - no - why? … because I don't love ***them***, but with T it's different, and what a relief to know he was absolutely fine!
Children are precious to their parents… but what struck me in this passage is just how precious these Thessalonian Christians are to Paul!

Whilst I can understand such a response with regard to my own firstborn son - it does make me sit up and take note, when i realise that Paul is talking here about his church family
… Because if I'm honest, my cares and concerns are not always in line with the apostle Paul's… and by extension the Lord Jesus'
But when we see Paul's passion, concern and relief, it's a humbling reminder to me, to not take **our** being able to meet together, for granted!
… but more than that, these verses are a great reminder of the **joy** that such fellowship brings, as well as who is ultimately responsible!

Look with me at verse 9, for you won't catch Paul patting himself on the back!

v9 - he can't thank God enough
- this is no polite 'thank-you' said with no real feeling, like perhaps when someone gives you your receipt at a supermarket checkout

no no… this is abounding thanksgiving, overflowing thankfulness to God!
…in the sense that *"if i spend the rest of my life thanking God, it still won't be enough!"*
why such thankfulness?… Well, because Paul knows their continuing as Christians, even when having a tough time, is all ultimately God's doing!
huge thankfulness…but also great joy!
Again, v9… Paul speaks of great joy - actually he writes *"for all the joy that we rejoice in"* - in other words *"we are joyfully rejoicing!"*
So often my joy/contentment is bound up with ***my*** physical circumstances rather than ***someone else's*** spiritual circumstances… but not Paul

Jesus first… **O**thers second… **Y**ourself last

So here Paul gives us another great reminder that we are called into a community of believers, that we are united to one another as brothers and sister in Christ
… and that there is great encouragement to be taken from one another

… it is true that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone.. but the purpose was not so that we would **be** alone, or **live** alone!

Paul rejoices in, and thanks God for the faith and love of other believers
… but this is not the end of it!
yes he breathes again
yes he overflows with thanks to God
yes he rejoices joyfully
… but he also prays with purpose

why?… because he is ***as concerned*** about their future, as he is their present!

… and because verse 10… there are gaps in their understanding, which is why he not only thanks God in prayer, but also prays ***to God…*** asking that he might see them again - not just for a reunion, as wonderful as that would have been -
… but so he can *"supply what is lacking in their faith"*

Now this phrase probably requires a bit of explanation
… As we have already seen - these new Christians in Thessalonica are Christians - they have faith in Jesus Christ - they are trusting in him
they have turned from idols in repentance to serve the living and true God
.. so in this sense… their faith is **not** lacking - their salvation is certain!
.. but what Paul is talking about, is that whilst their trust is genuine and sufficient… their understanding of what it means to live as a Christian, to live faithfully… is incomplete
NB - this is the first letter Paul wrote - they don't have other bits of the NT they can turn to find the answers… they need the apostle to instruct them… but of course, Paul had to leave in such a hurry that there are gaps in their understanding…

physio finals - my revision did not go quite according to plan - in another words i started too late and so did not finish it
which meant that when I had to answer a question on a particular neurological condition - i knew v little about it… and so muddled thru an answer
Nevertheless, i passed my finals and qualified as a physiotherapist…
I was a chartered physiotherapist, and i had the certificate, and membership to prove it
… and yet there was clearly something lacking in my understanding… thankfully i then worked under a more experienced physic who was able to teach me, and demonstrate to me, how to treat that condition… i was fully qualified, but I still needed someone to supply what was lacking in my understanding

so the Thessalonians…
received the gospel - yes
believers - yes
trusting in Jesus as their saviour & Lord - yes
certain hope of heaven - yes
demonstrating a love for others - yes
and becoming known throughout the country because of it - yes

… understand everything about Christian living… no… not yet

which is why on hearing Timothy's report,
Paul rejoices… but he does not retire
… rather… he prays
… asking God that he might have the opportunity to return to Thessalonica and help them
… a prayer which was eventually answered… for we read in Acts 20 that Paul did visit Macedonia again… about 5 years later

But in the meantime, he does not just sit around and wait for the train ticket to arrive in the post
He is passionate that they continue to stand fast in the Lord
… which means that in the remainder of this letter, Paul will spend his time instructing them on certain practical areas of living with regard to relationships, and the return of Jesus
… But he also continues to pray for them

And so with the time we have left this morning/evening we we are going to focus on Paul's prayer for them
… it's a great model for us - because it shows us that passionate prayer for God's people is always borne out of a passion for God's people
… in other words, if we love others we will pray for them
… but it also helps us know ***what*** to pray

#2 - Paul prays to God asking for faith and love to grow in other believers

As I said, we learn that Paul is not only lovingly committed to them, but lovingly committed to praying for them!
… which highlights to us not only his commitment to them, but his dependance on God

We often wonder why the Christian life is so difficult to live, especially in the ordinary everyday relationships of life. The answer may very well be that we are trying to live it by ourselves. The man who goes out in the morning without prayer is, in effect, saying, 'I can quite well tackle to-day myself.' [Barclay]

… And what is quite clear from these last few verses, is that if these Thessalonians are to grow in faith and love - then Paul knows that ultimately, God will have to do it!

Back in v10 Paul tells us **when** he prays ("night and day") which means regularly rather then constantly… ***every*** night and day, rather than ***all*** night and ***all*** day
And he also tells us **how** he prays… ("earnestly") - the idea that his prayers are not just on his lips, but in his blood and bones

And now in vv11-13, we hear the **what** and **why** of his prayers…

we'll quickly consider this in 3 parts…

firstly… for the way to be cleared

we heard back in 2v18, that up until now, Paul had been unable to visit because Satan had hindered, literally "blocked the way… made the road impassable"
But Paul knows that God can make this happen and so he prays that it would!
Now, Paul knows full well, that they have been chosen by God (1v4) and that God is both willing and able to keep them Christian to the end
… but that that doesn't stop him from doing all that he can to strengthen their faith - hence his desire to see them and to teach them

and so he prays that God might smooth the path for them to see each other again
As John Stott writes… Paul knows that *"there is no substitution for face to face fellowship"*

But then Paul turns his attention once again to their faith and love.
So just as Timothy's report of their faithful living and love for one another encouraged Paul, so he prays that they would continue to grow in these areas until the day Jesus returns.

So secondly…
he prays that there love will increase and abound for one another, and for everyone

Paul has already commended them for their love that labours for one another… but he wants their love to abound all the more.
What this looks like specifically and practically, Paul will go on to instruct them in the next chapter

But because Paul is clear that God is the source of love, he doesn't simply tell them to “be more loving!”.
Paul knows he can increase their knowledge… but love is something only God can increase.
It requires a supernatural work in our hearts, as loving others goes against our natural desire to love ourselves.
Which is why he prays his requests to God, because he knows that what he is asking is something which God is definitely able to do, and which God’s people are called to do (1 John 4:7)

But if we are ever struggling to know what to pray for each other, or for ourselves… here is a great place to start - to pray that we would more and more, have love for each other (our Christian brothers and sisters)… and for everyone else.

That’s the ***what*** of Paul’s prayer… and now thirdly we come to the ***why***?

thirdly…
And once again a bit of explanation is perhaps required
… because the danger comes if we misunderstand what he means by the phrase “establishing our heart blameless and holy before God”

Paul is **not** saying that if they have enough love for others, and live holy enough lives (ie without sin) - that their hearts will then be blameless (ie acceptable before God) on the day Jesus returns
… This is not Paul’s 2 step-guide to earning a blameless heart!
… do good stuff (love), avoid doing bad stuff (be holy) = acceptable by God

That would fly be to in the face of all he has already said and all he will say - not just in this letter but all his letters!

what Paul is saying is this… because of Jesus death on the cross, because you are trusting in him to have paid for your sins… you are blameless before God, right before God, justified before God
you are above reproach
no accusation may be brought against you
Satan (the accuser) has no basis for accusing you
Jesus has paid the ransom, cleared the debt, taken the punishment… so that we can enjoy fellowship with God
… that status is secure… won for us by Jesus Christ

But he also tells them and us **what** he prays - to help **us** remember that God’s will for his rescued people is to reflect His character, just as his son did
… to help us remember that **our** practice as Christians should match **our** status as Christians - that we might be who we are in Christ

… Well for that, we need God to strengthen our hearts don’t we?
Which is why Paul prays to God that their hearts may be strengthened to keep on loving others as Jesus does, until Jesus returns

Its a beautiful prayer to be praying for one another, that demonstrates our love for others, and our dependance on God
So as I close, may i encourage you to develop the habit of praying for one another… that here at Westlake we may be those who are growing in our love for one another, and who rejoice and thank God when we see Him doing that work amongst us