

2 Thessalonians: Conclusion

Call to Worship: Psalm 23

1st Scripture: John 16

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

Hymn #27- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Hymn #13- *O Worship the King*

Hymn Insert- *Benediction Song*

Introduction:

Having sought to encourage the suffering brethren at Thessalonica, and having addressed his primary theological and practical concerns in this letter, finally, we move on to consider Paul's customary and yet relevant closing benediction.

I. The Benediction

"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all."

There are two factors to be noted in this benediction, which ought to have been a great comfort for the suffering Thessalonians:

1) The Lord whom they serve is identified as "the Lord of peace." What a wonderful thing it is to know that our all sovereign God, Creator and Lord, who has the ability to squash us (and to justly cast us into everlasting torments and outer darkness forever) by the mere proclamation of His Word, who is holy and wrathful toward sin and sinners, yet, with respect to His redeemed church, is not the "God of wrath," but rather, "the God of peace!" God's thoughts toward His people are always within a context of peace.

We might rightly say, "But how can that be? How can so holy a God look upon those who still struggle with sin, while never changing His demeanor toward them for even a moment? How can He be forever designated *the* God of peace, toward them? Well, Paul here assumes what the Scriptures everywhere affirm, namely, that God's wrath toward His people has been completely exhausted in the crucifixion and death of His own Son. Jesus drank the whole cup of God's wrath, down to the dregs! He exhausted the whole infinite weight of that wrath! In Romans 3:25-26, Paul states:

God has set forth Jesus, "as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." God can rightly justify sinners; He can declare sinners righteous in His sight, and treat them forever as objects of His love and peace, because Jesus has propitiated the wrath of God in His own Person, on the cross. And so, in Christ, our God who must be eternally just; our God who cannot overlook sin and remain just, yet justifies sinners and is "the Lord of peace" toward us. And what better designation can there be for our God, who preordained and procured this peace, for us, when we wanted absolutely nothing to do with Him the whole time! He, in fact, reaches into our evil realm; no, He enters it, and initiates peace with those who are naturally unrepentant.

2) We note not only that God is the Lord of peace Himself, but furthermore, He is able to give us peace always *in every way*. [See vs. 16a again]

Now, particularly in a context where the Thessalonians were suffering persecution continually, and where they had already lost some of their beloved brethren throughout the course of this persecution, how in the world could Paul hope and state, with any level of honesty or realistic expectation, that God would give them peace *always in every way*? Isn't that like me saying to you this morning, "May the Lord give you no conflict for the rest of your lives?" You would answer, "Pastor, that's ridiculous! In this body, and in this flesh; in this yet, incomplete state, it would be impossible for us to experience *no conflict* for the rest of our lives, here! Indeed, we are promised conflict and suffering, even as a means of furthering our sanctification!"

You see, but Paul is not talking about outward, physical peace, without any suffering or contention. He is talking about an inward peace that the people of God can always have, in spite of every bit of outward conflict and opposition they might and will face. This is what he is wishing on their behalf, in this benedictory appeal to God. He desires that they experience true rest on the inside, continually, even as their bodies, perhaps, are broken on the outside. Well then, how is this even possible? Only, as we remind ourselves of who we are in Christ, and of all that He has accomplished on our behalf, on the cross, and by His resurrection, none of which can

ever be changed. You see, that impenetrable peace can never be shattered. However, when forgotten, it can lead to weariness and despair.

Recall again brethren, our Lord's words from John 16:32-33, where He was seeking to comfort His weary disciples, who would soon face great discouragement at the sight of His suffering, as well as their own suffering, following His ascension to glory:

"Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

This is exactly the type of peace that Paul is speaking about in our text, which he prays God will grant the Thessalonians. Notice, in both the context and in the direct statements of our Lord, He says very plainly that they will suffer persecution and tribulation in the world. That is inevitable for the faithful Christian. However, there is a blessed place of unending respite and peace for the soul, which can be always accessed in the heart, even if the body is presently being torn limb from limb. And that place of respite and peace is in Christ! How is this the case? Because He has already overcome the world for us!

In what specific way does this bring His suffering people peace? They can be ever mindful of the fact that no matter what happens in this life; no matter what happens to the body; no matter if the body is itself killed, nothing can ever change who we are and what we have *forever* in Christ! In Christ, we are reminded that even death itself has no lasting victory, because the people of God are guaranteed a glorious resurrection, with a new, glorified body that is imperishable! In other words, every ounce of suffering here is temporal, at best! It is a mere moving tributary, preparing to splash into an unending ocean of glory, at the right hand of God, where there are joys, forevermore! We have peace with God, in the present, and without end, and nothing in this world can ever, ever change that! And that present reality is what secures a present peace for the people of God, no matter what they might experience in the body in this life! In Christ, the Thessalonian's peace was found! In the world, they had tribulation...much tribulation, but they could be of good cheer, because He has overcome the world!

This is the substance of Paul's benediction. And he sums that whole package up with these words; words of all comfort for a people suffering tribulation: "The Lord be with you all" (16b).

Indeed, the truest evidence of the Lord's peace, is that He is now, because of Christ, with His people. We may not always realize this. Trials may cause us to feel a distance. But, beyond the shadow of any doubt, God is always with His people. And that being the case, there is nothing that they cannot endure for His Name's sake! What a glory beyond all glories, that the Thessalonians could know this true for themselves because Christ was forsaken, so that they would never, not even for a moment, be forsaken by God. In fact, when you read Psalm 22, out of all the terrible sufferings that our Lord endured, which are described there, was it not the fact that He, bearing *our* sin, having been forsaken by God, was the most agonizing of all of His torments? What is His expression of torment as the sky turned dark at midday? "My God, My God, why have You *forsaken Me?*" And then, as you weave through the rest of that Psalm, getting a vivid description of His suffering, you come first upon verse 11, and hear that dreaded plea, "Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help." And then, again, you soar through His descriptive sufferings, until you get to verse 19, where He utters, in a state of abandonment, "But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My strength, hasten to help Me!"

You see, worst of all, in the suffering of Christ, was the abandonment unto judgment, that He had experienced, away from the delightful presence of the Father. It were, as if, if the Father had only but held His hand through it all, it would have been much more bearable. But our sin, oh the weight of agony, turned His Father's good pleasure away from that cursed Savior, such that He was pleased to crush Him, for the sake of His seed! And so, Paul can say, "May the Lord be with you all," not simply as a kind gesture or common expression, but because, in Christ, even in their darkest trials and persecutions, they would never, ever experience God's judgment or abandonment.

Finally, Paul concludes, "The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (vs. 17-18).

While Paul used an amanuensis for the writing of his letters, he added his own signature to them, seeking to affirm that he was indeed the true author. With rumors going around that

Christ had returned already, and at a time when impersonators had no problem trying to use the names of others for their own agenda, Paul had a signature reference, which helped affirm his true authorship. And that included the final words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." And when you look at every one of the letters which Paul had written (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon), they all end with an identical or very similar, "grace be with you" like statement. You won't find this in the other epistles. However, it is a note of interest that Hebrews ends like this, "Grace be with you all. Amen." That could be some potential support for a Pauline authorship of Hebrews, but we'll leave that for another time.

All in all, as I have stated in the past, Paul knows that the Christian life begins, continues and completes its course, only by the grace of God. If the grace (free favor) of God were ever removed from us, even for a moment; if we ever were caused to depend on ourselves for anything, we would quickly go astray, and never make it to glory. The simple fact that I know that I am ever surrounded by the grace of God, is all the comfort I could ever desire, to have confidence that I will make it home! God's grace is to the soul, what oxygen is to the body. The soul would quickly die and shrivel up in corruption, if God's fresh, daily, momentary grace were not constantly there to sustain it.

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having completed Paul's second Letter to the Thessalonians, let us now conclude our study, with a few relevant, closing applications, particularly in the light of what we have gone over this morning:

1) Brethren, be encouraged! Whatever trials you presently face; whatever trials you have in front of you, know that, while your temporal circumstances here may change (often?), physically, economically, psychologically, emotionally...there is one thing that will not and cannot ever change! And that is who you are in Christ! In Him, even in the midst of great suffering and persecution, you always have peace with God! God is your God and Father, and He is for you, and He is using every circumstance in your life, like the wind, as a means of driving you right into His glorious heaven! In the world, you will (absolutely will) have

tribulation. But, in Christ, you have peace! And be of good cheer, because He has overcome the world! God is for you and with you, and nothing can ever change that! Because of this...

2) Remember that, although we are fighting a battle, we are fighting a battle that we cannot possibly lose. In fact, it has already been won...at the cross. The unfolding experience, which brings us to the completion of Christ's victory is difficult and painful, but it is moving toward a guaranteed end! The Lamb that was slain, has opened the seals on the scroll, and the will of God on behalf of His church, going forward, must succeed. There's tribulation and sorrow and trial in that course (opposition, a dragon, 2 beasts...etc), but last I looked, the end of the Book says that when the dust settles, Christ and His church stand victorious, and His enemies are crushed in the winepress of His wrath.

And so, brethren, if you can imagine being dropped into a battle, perhaps somewhere in the Middle East, where there are people who hate you and want to kill you, but no matter what happens in that battle, in the end, you must win and you will dine at the banquet feast with Christ, then ultimately, you have nothing to fear, do you? You can concentrate on the mission at hand, bombarding the gates of hell with the power of the gospel, looking to rescue captive souls, by bringing them to Christ! Press on and persevere; keep on keeping on, because you're not fighting a battle of uncertainty. You're going forth in the Name of Christ, who has been given authority over all things, everywhere. And, in the end, every knee will bow to Him, in heaven, on earth and under the earth!

3) Friends, if you are not in Christ; if you are not a Christian, then know for certain, that if you remain on that course, your end will be; indeed, it must be, destruction! The whole entire course of history is on a track. It is on the track of God's providence, and you are either with Him or against Him. Look where you are standing right now, and ask yourself this question: "If I, like so many others in the world, die this day, where does this path lead?" Are you in Christ? If not, then you are presently set on a course for hell. You're one stroke or aneurism, one freak accident, one stray bullet, one car accident, always one breath, as it were, from sealing your eternal destiny! Don't die in your sin! Seek Christ, right now, this day, this moment, before it is too late!

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!