

## **“The Lord of Grace and Peace” – 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18**

This morning, we come to the end of our journey through First and Second Thessalonians. I pray that the Lord has blessed you in this and that He has drawn you a little closer to Himself.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

And that is why I’m committed to expository preaching; to read distinctly from the word, to give the sense and explain the meaning. (Nehemiah 8:8)

As I’ve mentioned before, and often, Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians shortly after sending 1 Thessalonians. He needed to encourage the Thessalonian church. False teachers and false doctrine had crept in, largely due to their desire to see Jesus return soon. So, Paul had to make sure they had a correct understanding. He confirmed the wonderful truth that Jesus would return, but there was some stuff that will happen first. A great apostasy will take place and the man of sin will be revealed. In the meantime, we Christians need to be about the work Jesus left for us to do.

*Jesus said, “... you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

*He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; (Matthew 28:19-20)*

And we are to take care of the Church, which is the Bride of Christ, His very body in this world.

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

Part of our duty, as Christians, is to hold one another accountable and that means that we do need to engage in church discipline, up to and including disfellowship for unrepentant, public sin. In Thessalonica, there were those who were so unruly, that Paul exhorted them to “have nothing to do with those individuals.” If they don’t work, they don’t eat. But of course, the goal of church discipline must be the complete restoration of the brother or sister being admonished. We are to extend grace and be at peace to one another.

That, in fact is the nature of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of grace and peace.

*Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. 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. (2 Thessalonians 3:16-18)*

This week, I want to approach our text from the inside out. Those of you who are unrepentant linear thinkers will just have to get over it. We're going to start with verse 17.

*The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. (2 Thessalonians 3:17)*

Why was Paul compelled to make this statement? Why did he need to tell them that his salutation was a "sign in every epistle"? I believe he was giving the Thessalonians a way to judge the authenticity of his letters. Back in Chapter 2, if you remember, we read this:

*Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word **or by letter, as if from us**, as though the day of Christ had come. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2)*

That's a pretty good clue that somebody had forged a letter, or maybe even a series of letters that claimed to come from Paul. Those letters were teaching false doctrine.

Paul says, look, I always write my own salutation. When Paul composed his letters, he used an amanuensis, that is, one who takes dictation, or a secretary. Paul dictated his letters and someone else wrote down his words, but then Paul always added a few words to the end of his letters by his own hand. For example, toward the end of Galatians, he wrote:

*See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! (Galatians 6:11)*

Apparently, Paul's handwriting was unique and not particularly legible. We know he suffered from some physical ailment. He said as much. It was the "thorn in the flesh" he prayed that God would remove. (2 Corinthians 12:7) Perhaps it was partial blindness or a sort of palsy. (Being stoned and left for dead is likely to have left some lingering affect.) But for whatever reason, his penmanship seems to have been a little rough and it would have been hard for someone to duplicate it in a forgery. So, Paul says, in essence, "Be sure you guys check for the salutation that I write at the end of the letters. It will help protect you from forgeries."

That's pretty much what verse 17 is about.

Now, let's back up to verse 16.

*Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)*

Of course, this is a blessing. Or, you might call it a doxology. Paul is asking God to grant peace to the Thessalonian church. Let's look a little closer because there is some wonderful doctrine here.

Peace is something that everybody wants. Who doesn't want to have peace of mind? Really?

As we make our way through this fallen world, it seems that all we encounter is agitation. People are inconvenient, that's for sure. It seems like they never act exactly the way we would like. But even if we were completely isolated, living by ourselves, we would stir ourselves up. I tick myself up all the time. Why did I do that? Why did I say that? I know from hard experience that if I hit my thumb with a hammer, it hurts. But the next time I have a project that involves driving a nail, guess what I do?

We stumble, we fall, we fail. And don't get me started on what we see on the news. We want peace, but peace is elusive.

Did it ever occur to you that Satan wants you to be agitated? The devil doesn't want us to enjoy peace and certainly not the peace that God brings. He wants us to be afraid. He wants us to be angry and we seem so willing to let him have his way!

Listen, if you want to have peace, you have to go to the source. The source is Jesus Christ! He is the *Lord of peace* and you cannot have peace without the Prince of peace. Jesus says:

*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)*

The world gives agitation; Jesus gives peace, but you have to submit to Him.

First, you have to submit to His salvation. By nature, you are at war with God. You're a sinner. We all are.

*But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)*

Every one of us is guilty of cosmic treason and if you are a traitor towards God, you are His enemy. You know, don't you, what Jesus will do to His enemies?

*God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies; (Nahum 1:2)*

*The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)*

Eternal death. An eternity of agony, in the throes of death, burning in everlasting hell. That's something to be agitated about!

But God still loves us. That's such an incredible thing!

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:8-10)*

Have you been reconciled to God or are you still His enemy? You need to cease being His enemy! There is only one way. You have to submit to His Son. By an act of faith, you confess Jesus as Lord. "*Jesus, you are my Lord and my God.*" By an act of your will you believe God raised Him from the dead. "*Jesus, I believe you died for me, but I believe you were raised on the third day. I believe you are living now at the right hand of the Father.*"

We are justified by His blood. We are saved from wrath through Him. We are reconciled to God. We are saved by His life. If you have never done so, please, submit to Jesus. Submit to his salvation. When you do, you will be at peace with God and if you live in Christ, you will be at peace with yourself.

*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)*

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He is the Lord of Peace. Paul underscores it in this short doxology, this very short blessing.

*Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.  
The Lord be with you all. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)*

Now, let's look at verse 18:

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (2 Thessalonians 3:18)*

It's another blessing, another doxology. We get two for the price of one! This time, Paul is praying for grace. Grace is unmerited favor and that is what is available through faith in Jesus Christ.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.  
(Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Does anyone in here think that they deserve salvation? I hope not because not one of us does. God would be perfectly justified to turn His back and let every one of us spend eternity toasting and roasting in hell. God is just. God is righteous. But praise Him, He is also gracious.

Why do you think Jesus had to take on flesh and put up with all He had to put up with? God loves us so much, that He designed a way to be just and merciful at the same time. Just, because He poured out His wrath on the only perfect, sinless life ever lived. Merciful, because by Jesus' stripes, we are healed. You need Jesus Christ. You need Him for your salvation and you need Him for every breath you take.

Theologians make a distinction between common grace and saving grace. Common grace is given to everyone. Common grace is what makes it possible for the unsaved to keep on breathing. Common grace makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the just as well as the unjust. Common grace postpones judgment long enough for every human being to have a chance to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, but left to our own devices, not one of us would.

Special grace is granted to those who are being saved. Special grace came upon me in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, 400 feet below the surface in a steel tube. I read:

*"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:29)*

And I believed. I got it.

Can you believe in Jesus? Will you confess with your mouth, "Jesus, you are my Lord?" Can you believe God raised Him from the dead? Then praise Him for His special, saving grace.

Jesus is our Prophet, our Priest and our King. His grace and His mercy have made us members of His own family. We are joint heirs of His heavenly kingdom and He offers you His peace.

He is the Lord of grace and peace.