

The Peace and Presence of God

March 6, 2011

Scripture:
2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

Series: [Staying the Course When
You're Tired of the Battle:
Priorities for the Front
Lines \(10/10\)](#)

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May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
(2 Thessalonians 3:16, NIV)

We come today to the end of the letter, which is as rich as all that has gone before. It's a prayer for God's blessing on his people—a benediction. A benediction is simply a good word or a word of blessing.

We have seen that this letter is peppered with prayers. Paul's teaching to these people was shot through with praying for them. That's a mark of authentic ministry. You have to pray for the people you teach.

Here's what I'm praying for you

So for the last time in this letter, Paul says: "Here is what I am praying for you." Remember, this church was birthed in great turmoil. When Paul preached the message of Christ in Thessalonica these people came to faith.

Paul grounded them in what it means to be a disciple of Christ, but after just three weeks he had to leave the city. A mob from the marketplace stirred up trouble (Acts 17:5) and Paul was banished from the city. He could not go back.

These believers faced hostility from the beginning, and it was still going on, "Among God's churches, we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring" (2 Thessalonians 1:4).

Here are people who, after just a few months of trusting Christ, are rejected by their families and ridiculed at school. They are in the eye of a storm, and Paul says, "I am praying that you will have peace."

Peace at All Times

May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
(2 Thessalonians 3:16)

"At all times" means "in all circumstances." May God give you peace whatever you face! There's more. "At all times" also means "in every season of life." Think about this with me for a moment:

You arrive at middle school. Your body is coming to life, and you begin to wonder in a new way, “Who likes me?” May God give you his peace.

You go to high school. You feel under pressure, maybe for the first time, and you wonder, “Who am I?” and “Does anybody care?” Some of you are there. May God give you his peace.

You head off to college. You wonder, “Can I establish myself? Do I have anything to offer?” May God give you His peace.

You get into your twenties. If you are single, you may wonder, “Will I ever marry? Does God have someone for me?” Some who are married wonder, “Will we ever have children?” May God give you his peace.

Some young parents may be feeling the weight of responsibility for this tiny life God has trusted into your hands. May God give you his peace. A few years later you stop asking, “Will I be a good parent?” and you’re asking, “How did I become a taxi driver?!” May God give you his peace.

There are special pressures at work for those who are at mid-life. You’re no longer moving up the ladder. You’re staying at the same level, without the stimulus that got you there. May God give you his peace.

Beyond these years, lie your sixties and your seventies, when you begin to notice changes in yourself. You become more concerned about your health. You didn’t think about it much before. You begin to wonder, “What have I accomplished? Did I do the right things? What else might I have done?” May God give you his peace.

Then you move into your older years. “Faith for Life” is our gathering for seniors on Thursday afternoons. I ran into some folks coming from their meeting this week. One dear brother was walking with a frame, and moving with obvious difficulty. I asked him if he was in pain, “No, but it doesn’t get any easier you know.” May God give you his peace.

Peace at all times—in every season of life, wherever you are, whatever you are up against.

Peace in Every Way

May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
(2 Thessalonians 3:16)

How many ways are there to have peace? At least three:

1.) Peace with God

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

Here is the good news of the Gospel today, and I urge you to believe it. Christ died for your sins and rose for your justification. Faith makes what Jesus accomplished yours. That is how you have peace with God.

What do you know of this? Do you have peace with God today? Are you running from God? Are you afraid of God? Do you feel like hiding from him as Adam and Eve did?

Are you reluctant to pray? Do you feel that God is against you? That he has it in for you? That he is condemning you? Do you feel today that you would like to have this peace with God?

2.) Peace with yourself

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

You can have peace with God. You can be forgiven and justified, and still be in turmoil yourself. Can you say, "Be at rest, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you" (Psalm 116:7)? What do you know of this peace with yourself?

3.) Peace toward others

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:18)

In a situation of conflict, you can't control what others do or say about you. God says, "Look to your own part here. As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

If someone hurts you deeply, it opens wounds that can easily fester with bitterness, pride and even hatred. You hear Christ say, "Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you." What do you know of this? Do you need to know more of the peace that would enable you to do that?

This is a remarkable life-long prayer, not only that you'll have peace, but that you'll have peace at all times and in every way. How is it possible for an ordinary person to have peace at all times and in every way?

The Lord of Peace

...the Lord of peace! (2 Thessalonians 3:16)

Human language can barely convey the wonder and glory of who Christ is and what he does. The Bible uses many names and titles to describe our Lord Jesus Christ,¹ including “the Lord of peace.” What does this mean?

Christ has peace

“My peace I give to you.” (John 14:27)

Jesus has peace and that is why He is able to say this to His disciples. He has it in Himself and that is why He is able to give it to you.

Christ makes peace

This is why Jesus came into the world. He came to make peace between God and us. That’s why the angels said “peace to men.” This is why he was born. He made this peace. How? “Through his blood shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20).

Christ gives peace

May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
(2 Thessalonians 3:16)

Christ is the Lord of peace. The word, “Lord” has authority in it. That means Jesus has command over peace. Peace goes where he sends it.

A storm had risen on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus was in a boat with the disciples. The whole lake was in turmoil. Christ speaks and he says, “Peace, be still.” (Mark 4:29, KJV). And as he speaks, he imparts peace to the lake! That’s what it means to be the Lord of peace.

Paul says, “This is what I am asking Christ to do for you! May the Lord of peace... give you peace!” Christ is Lord over peace. He commands it. He gives it. He sends it. He says to peace, “Go fill the heart of the person who came here in great turmoil. Go fill that worried heart.”

This is something Christ does himself, “May the Lord of peace himself give you peace.” This is a direct ministry of Christ to your soul. This peace can be yours. Christ died to secure it. He lives to bring it.

Why doesn’t Paul end there?

This seems like the perfect ending. Why does he go on? Because we need to ask for peace, but we also need to know how to receive it. I pray, but then what do I do next?

Remember, this is a real letter written to real folks who were facing great difficulties. They don't know what the future holds. They have many fears. They have to wake up on Monday morning and face them.

The worst thing you can ever do with your fears is to suppress them. Fear is like a coiled spring. The more you press it down, the more it will push back against you. There is only one way to deal with the fears lurking in your life, and that is to bring them out into the open and face them.

It doesn't help to say, "Well, don't worry, it may never happen." Don't say that to yourself. Don't say that to others. It only leads to asking, "What if it does happen? What if I do have cancer? What if I do lose my job? What if I am left on my own? What then?"

There will be times when you lie awake at night worrying about these things, "What if the unthinkable happens?" Here's what you can do:

1. Ask Christ to give you his peace (3:16)
2. Remind yourself of the foundation on which peace rests (3:17-18).

In other words, this prayer is not a helpless cry in the dark. It is grounded in the promise of God. And as you make this prayer, you are to bring the foundation of peace to mind.

The Foundation of Your Peace

God's presence is with me

The Lord be with all of you. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)

There is a special beauty in this because Paul could not be with them. He led them to Christ and established them as disciples. He was their "father" in the faith. He was the one they looked to, but after just three weeks he had been taken from them and was not able to return.

Think of the circle of people God has placed around you—family, friends and colleagues. Who's the person you lean on most for help? Do you ever say, "What would I do without him? What would I do without her?" Here's your answer: God's presence is with you!

God's promise is sure

the distinguishing mark in all my letters. (2 Thessalonians 3:17)

Why does he add these strange words? It's good to remember how the books in our Bible were given, "All Scripture is God-breathed." (2 Timothy 3:16). All the words of this book were breathed out by God. God is their source. He gave them to us through apostles and prophets.

Peter says, “No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). In other words, prophets weren’t making these up to encourage people. Peter adds, “Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

The words of this letter, that have fed our souls, did not have their origin in Paul. These words came *to* him. They were God-breathed. Their source and origin is God. He was carried along by the Holy Spirit. When you read the Bible you can read it with this confidence—you’re reading the Word of God.

Picture Paul walking round the room dictating the words of this letter. Words are coming to him. He is being carried along by the Holy Spirit. And, as he speaks these words, someone is writing them down. Maybe it was Silas or Timothy or some other scribe.

Then as Paul gets to the end, he says, “Give me the pen.” He goes over to the parchment and writes, “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.” Do you see the importance of that?

This is the mark of apostolic authenticity. It’s more than an autograph, which might be easy to forge. He writes out two sentences and says, “This is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.”

This is important because earlier in the letter, Paul spoke about another “letter [that] supposed[ly had] come from us” saying that the day of the Lord had already come (2:2). These were forged letters that were being pushed around the churches.

Apostolic letters had authority in the churches. Letters from the Apostles were passed between the churches from earliest days so that the people could be encouraged by them. It’s not surprising that false teachers, who wanted to promote themselves, wrote their own letters and then claimed that they were apostolic so that the churches would read them.

There was great potential for confusion. How could you know that a letter really came from Paul? How could you tell an apostolic letter from one that was a fake or a forgery? Paul says “This is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.”

Do you see how important this was for them and for us? God spoke his Word through apostles and prophets. This letter really is apostolic. This is what God says and you can trust it.

Here’s how you face your greatest fears and your darkest days—God has spoken in the Scriptures and you can rest your life, your death and your eternity on what He has said. God cannot lie. The Scripture cannot be broken. Jesus said, “My words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

God's grace is sufficient

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

Paul knew what it was to be unbearably crushed. He knew what it was to face overwhelming pressure, to feel his own weakness and for Christ to say to him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). His grace is sufficient for you too in all times and in every way.

Face your fears. Don't push them back. Bring them out into the open. When you find yourself awake at night, ask Christ to give you his peace, then remind yourself of the foundation on which this peace rests:

God's presence is with me.

God's promise is sure.

God grace is sufficient.

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¹ <http://www.casagrandebaptistchurch.com/NamesofJesus.html>