

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### Exhortation to a Faithful Church

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 3-4

Code: 90-414

That was wonderful, thank you, Clayton, for leading us in all those musical prayers this morning, and because of the release of the book *At The Throne of Grace*, everything sort of centered around prayer. And that's wonderfully well-orchestrated by the Holy Spirit because this morning we're going to look at the prayer of the Apostle Paul for the Thessalonian church which we read a little bit earlier, a very fitting connection to the things that are going on.

I do want to say thank you to my children who were so kind and gracious as to produce that book. They told me they wanted to do it. I was a little reluctant but they prevailed on me. And I only asked one thing and that was before you print those prayers, I need to look at them and make sure that the grammar is okay and that that's what I want to say. So there were some slight adjustments since...you're kind of freewheeling when praying, and we hope they'll be a wonderful blessing to you.

I've never had a more wonderful tribute than what is written in there by my four children. I love them, they know that, profoundly and deeply. And this is a wonderful gift back to me. They're precious. Their spouses are equally precious, and their children as well. But this is a wonderful joy for me to have this. So thank you to my children, and I hope you'll be blessed and encouraged by these prayers as well.

The two weeks that we have, last week and this week, before I go away again for three Sundays, to traverse Europe to visit all of our missionaries and preach about 26 times, and I'm sure they'll add another five or six on top of that when we get there. We have these two weeks in this little period of time and because you all have been focusing on me and focusing on finishing the New Testament and now focusing on the book of prayers, that was...it was my desire in my heart to turn that around and to thank you for all that this church is, all it has been, all it is and continues to be in my life by way of profound blessing. So last Sunday we looked at 1 Thessalonians 1 and 2. I chose this letter to spend these two weeks looking at it because this is a church that was a joy to its pastor. Paul says to them at the end of chapter 2, "You are our glory and joy. And you heard me read again in chapters 3 and 4 how delighted he is with them and how much joy they bring to his heart.

This is a church that brought its pastor nothing but joy. There are no condemnations in this letter. There are no warnings in this letter. There are no threats in this letter. There are no exposures of sin in this letter. This church is the one church among those that Paul wrote to in the New Testament that he pastored, shepherded where there was nothing but joy in the ministry there. This is a rare church.

But so is our church. And so last week I told you that you are the Thessalonian church of Southern California in this period of history. You have brought me unending joy, constantly joy.

This church was such a joyful church that whenever Paul was away, he couldn't wait to get back. And we heard him say that. It was as if, in chapter 3 verse 1, he couldn't endure any longer his separation from them. He couldn't endure any longer worrying about them. And so he was desirous to come back and be with them, spend time with them. That was the longing of his heart.

He in verse 10 of chapter 3 said, as you remember me reading, "Night and day we keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face." He missed them. I can identify with that. After completing the New Testament, I was away for a few months, but you were never out of my mind or my heart. And it was always the anticipation that I would be back and with you and ministering with you, and preaching to you, and shepherding you that kept the light burning in my own heart.

To go away again for a few weeks, you just need to know that you will never be out of my mind or ever out of heart and always my desire will be to come back. And there's a reason. As joyful as this church is, as blessed as this church is, this church is not yet perfect...not yet perfect. And that is why the Apostle Paul said in chapter 3 that he wanted to see them, verse 10, to complete what is lacking...to complete what is lacking.

In chapter 4 verse 1, he said that, "Finally, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God, just as you actually do walk, that you excel still more." And then he says it again at the end of verse 10. "We urge you, brethren, to excel still more."

Well, this is what is on Paul's heart and this is what is on my heart as well. The first two chapters, commendation of a faithful church. The second two chapters, an exhortation to a faithful church. And it really is more than an exhortation, it's really an intercession. It's really prayer that marks the heart of the Apostle. He tells them to excel still more. He tells them to keep moving on the path, to complete what is lacking. But he turns it into a prayer in verses 11 through 13, and that's going to be the basis of what I want to say. This is basic, this is kind of like Pastoral Prayer 101, this is the foundation of all things that we would pray for you, things you know but need to be reminded of.

But here is Paul's prayer that we want to focus on in verses 11 to 13, "Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to You. And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people just as we also so for you so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."

This is a prayer. It may be in the third person, but it's still a prayer. It was not uncommon for the Apostle Paul to pray prayers in the third person, "May our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to You." That is a prayer. And most of the time we pray, we pray in the second person, speaking directly to God. But it was very common in the early church to speak this way, in the third person. You find such things in church history as a part of the life of the church very often before or after a sermon. And they are common in the prayer life of the Apostle Paul for the churches that he shepherded and the people that he loved. He prayed, as it were, wishes, so of gathering up everyone in his prayer and offering it to God.

Spurgeon once wrote, "I take it that a minister is always praying. He is not always in the act of prayer, but he lives in the spirit of prayer." I understand that. One can hardly always be in the act of prayer. When the Bible says "Pray without ceasing," it doesn't mean that you're forever mumbling words of prayer. What it does mean is that you're always in the spirit of prayer. Spurgeon further said, "If you are a genuine minister of God, you will stand as a priest before the Lord, spiritually wearing the ephod and the breastplate whereon you bear the names of the children of God, pleading for them within the veil."

I see myself as a prophet, speaking forth the Word of God to you. I see myself as a priest, wearing you on my heart and bringing you before the throne of grace. We have tried to illustrate that kind of priestly intercession in our prayers on Sunday morning. And by the way, for those of you who might not know what that was, I read one of them in the prayer today, one from some time back. That is a priestly act and that is part of what it means to be a pastor. And even a church that is a source of endless joy, a church that is the glory and joy of its pastor is a church that is yet imperfect. The Apostle Paul in Philippians 3 said, "Not as though I have attained..." None of us as an individual has attained the prize, the goal, the mark which is Christ's likeness. None of us is yet like Christ and consequently as well as we are doing, we aren't doing what we should do. As far as we have come, we haven't come far enough because we're not like Christ.

The Apostle Paul said to the Ephesians that pastors are given to the church for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry until they come to the fullness of the stature of Christ. None of us is ever going to be that in this life, that is the prize for the upward call, Christ's likeness. We press toward that goal which will one day be the prize. It is characteristic then of a faithful pastor to always be bearing up his people before God and praying that they would become more like Christ. This is his prayer.

These kinds of prayers appear in Paul's writings. Now almost in a serendipitous fashion, they just pop up. There is one, as I read you, in verse 11 to 13 of chapter 3. Another one appears in chapter 5 as he is listing a series of very brief, almost staccato commands to the believers as a part of excelling still more, as a part of growing toward Christ's likeness. Again in verse 23 he launches into this kind of a third-person kind of prayer, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely and may

your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is a prayer. That is a prayer for their entire sanctification, spirit, soul, body, all preserved, mature, complete, without blame...when they face the Lord.

There is even more of that kind of praying if you follow his second letter to the Thessalonians, again this is a church that is everything one could want a church to be. And yet it isn't all that it should be. And so another prayer rises in 2 Thessalonians 3 and verse 5, “May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.”

Well he already says they have love, he already says they have steadfastness, way back in chapter 1 verse 3 of the first letter. And yet he wants more. He wants them to excel more. And that invites his petition. At the end of chapter 3 in 2 Thessalonians, it appears again, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually give you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all.”

And it wasn't just the Thessalonians who were on his heart in the matter of prayer. Another illustration comes from the book of Romans. Paul is talking about unity in the church and he's instructing the church at Rome about what they need to do to preserve and protect and pursue unity. And in the midst of that, he launches into a very similar, sort of third-person prayer, verse 5 of Romans 15, “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus.” And he does it again in verse 13, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Similar things appear in his other letters as well.

This form, almost a kind of a benedictory prayer, is an expression of the feeling of his heart. It sort of rises up in the midst of his writing to them. He turns toward God to plead with God to be the power to enable them to become what it is that he asks of them.

So here is a church that is to be commended and God is to be thanked for all that happened there, like our church. But here is a church also to be petitioned for, to be interceded for that excels more and more and that it increases in all the necessary areas of spiritual development toward Christ's likeness.

In all that I read you about his prayers, including the one in 1 Thessalonians and in 2 Thessalonians, the two in chapter 3, the petitions revolve around the same elements, even the ones in Romans mention the same things. Three things appear in his prayers...faith, hope and love....faith, love and hope, in any order. And we're not surprised by that because in 1 Corinthians 13 those are essentially the triumvirate of premiere virtues and now abides faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love. What Paul wants for them has to do with their faith and their love and their hope. He is concerned about their spiritual development and those are the necessary areas.

In Philippians, a wonderful letter, at the very beginning in chapter 1 and verse 9, he said, "And this I pray," again another of these prayers, "That your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ, having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." Again he's praying for their love, their love grounded in truth and knowledge and discernment and manifesting itself in sincerity and blamelessness and the fruit of righteousness.

In opening the letter to the Colossians, there's a similar prayer, "For this reason," verse 9, Colossians 1, "since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you." And what are you asking? "That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all power according to His glorious might for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

In all of these, it is about their faith yielding in righteousness. It is about their love manifesting itself in mutual service. And it is about their hope that produces endurance and patience in the midst of all their suffering and trials.

Summing it up in Galatians 4, verse 19, Paul says, "I have birth pains until Christ is fully formed in you." That's the goal. And while he is thankful and grateful and joyful, he still feels the pain of the church that is not yet complete. We are not yet complete.

And so, back to chapter 3, our text, the Apostle Paul, verse 11, goes to God in prayer. "Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you." He's away from them now, hence the letter, he will be away from them for a long time. In fact, it probably is five years before he will be with them. There's a record of his visit about that time in his life and ministry, recorded for us in Acts 19 and 20, referred to in 1 Corinthians 16, mentioned in 1 Timothy 1, where he went back to Macedonia and we can't imagine that when he went to Macedonia he wouldn't have gone to Thessalonica because this is the church that he loved so greatly and that loved him so richly. But his prayer is that he wants to go back.

It took a long time for that prayer to be fulfilled, and in the meantime he's worried about the church. He knows that as good as his experience there was, as blessed as their fellowship was, as wonderful as their spiritual responses were, as evident as their sanctification was that it's still a church that's going to be assaulted by the enemy. So in chapter 3 verse 1 he said, "We could endure it no longer and so we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone and we sent Timothy, our brother, and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith." Again,

he always starts with wanting to strengthen faith...strengthen faith...that's the foundation. And his concern was that he didn't know what was going on and so he was willing to be isolated and all alone, leaving him in that position because he sent Timothy to this church to find out how they were doing. He was left in a very trying and difficult situation. He describes it in verse 3 of afflictions.

Verse 6 tells us that Timothy came back. And now that Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith.

A message came back the church is healthy. Faith is strong. Love is strong. Hope is strong. And Paul was so blessed and he summed up the reason, verse 8, "Now we really live if you stand firm in the Lord." I understand that. That every pastor understands. Every pastor understands that his joy is in a church that stands firm, strong in faith, strong in love, strong in hope.

And so the gratitude of verse 9, "What thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your behalf?" This is rare. And this has been my experience. Even when I am away, not for these prolonged periods, the message always comes back of your faith and your love and your hope. One might think this is a good time to go, maybe go somewhere else, do something else. But that certainly is not my heart, nor was it Paul's because in verse 10 he recognizes that the people in his church were not yet complete, they were lacking. And amazingly, as strong as their faith was, he says they were lacking in faith. As strong as their love was, he said, "You need to increase and abound in your love." And as strong as their hope was, their hearts needed to be established even more firmly in that hope.

One could say that the work is really never done, is it? Never really done for any shepherd or any pastor. I don't think there's any pastor who ever could say, "Well, my work here is finished," and walk away. There may be other reasons that someone might leave, but not because everybody's like Christ.

So the Apostle Paul reaches in prayer to God. It's a marvelous statement in verse 11. "Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord," and let's stop there. That's the salutation in his prayer. He's addressing himself to God and the Lord Jesus. And this is a statement that like many in the New Testament affirm that Jesus is equal to God. Jesus is God. In fact, in the Greek it reads this way, "Himself...that's the pronoun *autos* that's the first word in the sentence...Himself, our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct. Himself is singular, direct is a singular verb. Himself, a singular person acting to direct and yet it's two, it's the Father and the Son, unmistakably referenced to the equality of the Father and the Son...one in essence and yet two persons acting as one. The sentence then is a recognition on Paul's part of the perfect deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now these three requests that he makes are just simple, and I'm just kind of sharing my heart with you on these, there's a lot that could be said because these things weave their way through this epistle. But let's just look at these three for a moment.

His desire is, first of all, for their perfecting faith...perfecting faith. You will notice that verse 10 ends with the comment that he prays most earnestly night and day to see them so that he can complete what is lacking in their faith.

Now if faith was some kind of a subjective reality, if all he was thinking about was I wish you could believe harder, why wouldn't his prayer be enough? Why does he need to go there and see them face-to-face and complete what is lacking in your faith? Because he's not talking about the subjective aspect of believing, he's talking about the content of what they believe. Faith can only be perfected as it comes to a fuller understanding of truth...a fuller understanding of truth.

What is faith anyway? It is trusting in the truth...it is trusting in the truth, believing the truth. And he needs to be there in order to teach them the truth. The New Testament is not available to them. The Old Testament is, but not the New. And the New Covenant has now exploded into the world, but there is not a lot to be read about it. There's no way they can turn, nobody has a tape ministry, nobody can download Paul. He needs to get there. And it's a passion for him. Chapter 2 verse 18, "We wanted to come to you, I, Paul, more than once." Verse seventeen, "All the more eager to see your face, this case Satan hindered him." Because he was the only source of truth for them. He was the Apostle. And there was not going to be any increase in their trust until there was increase in what they knew to be true.

Now that's why young Christians are so vulnerable, and it says in Ephesians 4 when you're young in the faith, you're tossed and carried about by every wind of doctrine, you lack discretion, discernment, wisdom, understanding. And your faith is weak as well because your faith is simply trusting in what you know to be true. And if what you know to be true is limited, then your trust is confined by what you know to be true.

What gives you the ability to believe God in the midst of everything is that you know God, you know Christ, you know the Spirit, you know the purpose of God, the plan of God, the destiny, the goal. You understand the doctrines of salvation in all their fullness and all their richness. You understand the purposes of God as laid out in Scripture and the more you know about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the power of Scripture and the truthfulness of Scripture, the stronger your faith is. This is a church that is strong in faith. In other words, this is a church with a high-level of trust in the truth.

I don't know if there's any church anywhere that has a stronger level of trust in the truth than you do because you have been exposed to so much of the truth in all its power and you trust what you know

to be the true Word of God, the basic key to spiritual growth is growing faith, and faith only grows as an understanding of revealed truth grows. That's why we say we can never get enough of Scripture. It isn't for its own sake, it is for the sake of being able to trust it in every situation in life, to believe it as the answer to every question and every dilemma, every disappointment, every failure, every tragedy.

Jude said, "Building up yourselves in the most holy faith. The faith, Jude said earlier, once for all delivered to the saints, meaning the revealed Scripture. You must have knowledge. You must like a babe desire the pure milk of the Word to grow because the exercise of your faith is completely connected to what you know to be true about divine purpose, plan and promise. You are renewed, Colossians 3:10, I just thought of it, "You are renewed to a true knowledge, a true knowledge according to the image of one who created him."

The truest knowledge of God will come to you through Christ. I know there are folks who think that God is revealed best in the Old Testament, He is revealed gloriously, wonderfully in the Old Testament, there's no question about that. But God spoke in time past through the fathers and through the prophets, but He's now spoken unto us in His Son and He is the express image of the Father. God is best seen in Christ. Your faith is connected to your knowledge of God made manifest in Christ.

Essentially, the Christian life is a life of faith. Greater and greater trust because of greater and greater instruction in the truth. Paul says, "I want to come there, I want to teach you more. I still feel that way. Wherever I go, I want to come back, I want to teach you more. I want to teach you more. And some of you, you've been coming in at all points along the way, you probably identify yourself with a book when you arrived, or a chapter, and we all need to hear more and know more and grow in our knowledge that our faith may be stronger. So we want to excel still more. That's his first petition, that's on his heart.

There's a second petition that the Apostle Paul has, not only for a progressing, growing perfecting faith, but also for a prospering and growing love. It's not a question of was there love in the hearts of these Thessalonians, there was. Chapter 4 verse 9, "As to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write you, you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." That was true. Romans 5:5, "The Spirit of God literally deposits the love of God in us, the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit. You have been given the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5, which is love. But he says you need to excel still more, you need to love even more, verse 10.

So his prayer in verse 12 then, "May the Lord direct our way to you for the increasing of your faith, but may the Lord direct our way to you also in order to cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all people, just as we also do for you." You love, but you don't love enough. You love but you don't love perfectly.



Jesus set the standard, John 13:1 it says, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them *eis teleios*, He loved them to perfection. This is a loving church, there's no question about it. But we need to love even more. We need to increase, we need to abound in love. We need our love to grow. Back in verse 6 of chapter 3, "He had good news about their love, like good news about their faith. But that was simply good news that they were going in the right direction, not that they had reached perfection. This is a church characterized by a labor of love, in chapter 1 verse 3. But it needed to grow. That was what we saw in Philippians 1, again just referring back to that, in verse 9, "That your love may abound still more and more," and listen, connected to real knowledge....real knowledge. Knowledge is the foundation of everything. Knowledge is what produces your trust in God and what drives your love...what drives your love. You need to love, you need to love the way we have loved you, you need to love each other more, you need to abound in loving one another, loving everyone.

There's a warning in chapter 4 that is important to give at this juncture, I think. Paul had loved them. He had loved them sacrificially. Back in chapter 2 verses 7 and following, "We proved to be gentle among you as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but our own lives because you had become very dear to us." We were able to work, our labor, our hardship, working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."

Now he showed his love to them by not being a burden to them. Showed his love to them by working hard to provide for himself so he didn't depend on them. He showed his love to them by giving them his very life, pouring out his life for them as a gift, as a sacrifice.

In chapter 4, Paul gives a warning about counterfeit love...about counterfeit love. After starting out in verse 1, talking about walking and pleasing God, he gives this warning in verse 3. "This is the will of God, your sanctification that is you abstain from sexual immorality." The world's counterfeit of love, sexual immorality. Stay away from sexual immorality is what he's saying. And somebody might say, "How far away?" Far enough away to be sanctified. The will of God is your sanctification, that's separation. Far away enough to be separated, to be sanctified from any kind of sexual immorality.

He further says that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. Vessel is your body. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9, "Beat your body into submission so that you don't become disqualified in serving the Lord cause your body's out of control. Stay away from sexual immorality. How far away? Far enough away to be sanctified. Take care of your body so that your body is a vessel of sanctification and honor. Verse 5 he adds another very important feature, "Do not operate in lustful passion like the Gentiles, the pagans who don't know God." Don't act like Godless pagans doing the things they do because they operate purely on the level of passion. Stay away from sexual immorality. Handle your body so it's sanctified and honored and avoid following your lustful

passions like the Godless people.

And then in verse 6 he moves beyond the individual and says, "Don't transgress and defraud a brother." In other words, when you fulfill your sexual desire at the expense of someone else in the church, you defraud that person of their purity and their virtue and their holiness.

I often say to young people. If some guy comes to you as a young lady and says, "I love you so much, I want to go to bed with you," know this, he doesn't love you. He's going to defraud you. He's going to take advantage of you. He's going to steal from you. He's going to transgress against you.

Paul says, "I loved you and I made my affection known to you because I treated you gently, tenderly, compassionately and I gave my life to protect you." So be careful of this false love in the world because God, in verse 7...well verse 6, first of all, because the Lord is the avenger in all such things, you don't get away with that. And God has not called us, verse 7, for the purpose of impurity, but sanctification. And if you don't like this, you'll have to talk to the Holy Spirit because if you reject this, you're not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you, you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, so you don't want to engage the Holy Spirit in sexual immorality. First Corinthians 6 has a lot to say about that.

So Paul throws in this aspect of making sure that when you engage yourself in love in the family of God, it's not the world's corrupt counterfeit. Then in verse 9, he comes back to this idea of love, as to the love of the brethren, "You are taught by God to love one another, but continue to do it. You already do it, do it even more, excel still more toward the brethren." It's there, you're doing it and says, "Keep doing it, do it even more."

And then he goes beyond that. First of all, there's a certain self-love that keeps you pure. Then there's the love of others. And then there's love for those...others in the church, and then there's the love for the outsiders, verses 11 and 12, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. Attend to your own business. Work with your hands just as we commanded you so that you will behave properly toward outsiders, and don't be a deadbeat. Don't be dependent. Don't be the person that they have to constantly bail out and rescue. Make it your desire, your ambition, striving to live a quiet life. Be quiet, be silent, mind your own business, live a tranquil life, 2 Thessalonians 3:11 he said, "Stop being busybodies." Attend to your own business, concentrate on your own life, work with your own hands so that your testimony isn't ruined with outsiders. You're showing love toward them, loving each other, living quietly, living peaceably, minding your own business, working hard to provide for all your needs and even having some to share with others. All of that is living lovingly...living lovingly.

So the Word of God is clear to us here that the pastor is concerned about the faith of a people based upon the truth that they know and that he is concerned about the manifest love of a people that rises out of that same truth. How do you know your love is growing? Less concern with self, less concern

with comfort, less concern with fulfillment, less preoccupation with your personal problems. More time spent on helping others, serving others, giving to others, increased sacrificial giving, greater sensitivity to the lostness of unconverted people.

Did God grant increased faith to this congregation? He did. Paul prayed that He would and He did. Chapter 1 verse 3, "We give thanks to God," this is 2 Thessalonians, the next letter, "we give thanks to God for you, brethren, as only fitting cause your faith is greatly enlarged and the love of each one of you toward one another grows even greater." Wow! That's what he prayed, and that's what God did. It was answered. God granted that.

There's a final thing to comment on and just briefly cause our time is gone, he prayed not only for a perfecting faith and a prospering love, but a purifying hope. Verse 13, this is again part of the prayer, "May our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints." He's looking now to the return of Christ. And he's saying, "May you appear holy when He comes." And that's what hope does. Hope is a purifying reality. First John 3 says, "Whoever has this hope in Him purifies himself." In other words, they live for the Second Coming. We saw that, chapter 1, didn't we? Verse 10, "You are a people who have turned to God from idols to wait for His Son from heaven." You're living in the light of the return of Christ. You're a Second Coming anticipator and it has an effect on how you live your life.

You know, to believe that Jesus could come at any moment, and he describes it at the end of chapter 4, right? The Rapture of the church which is the next event and it's a signless event, it could happen at any moment, any time, all the indicators that would be Tribulation signs that occur after the Rapture of the church are well in place. The Rapture could occur at any moment. This church was living so much in the anticipation of that, that they were worried that they might have missed it. They wanted to know what would happen to people who somehow missed it. That's why he describes what he does. Goes in to more detail in chapter 5.

But they lived in the light of the return of Christ and the Kingdom to come, and the glory of heaven. That changes how you deal with things in this world, doesn't it? That....that, in fact that defines how you deal with things in this world. Paul says, "Look, it really doesn't matter what happens to me in this world, what matters is what happens to me in eternal...in the eternal world to come." Paul wants their hearts established firmly in the hope of the return of Christ and seeing Him face-to-face because that will drive them toward holiness...that will drive them toward holiness.

When you live in the light of the fact that Jesus could come at any moment, you want to be found in a place where He'll be pleased and you will enjoy the best gifts of His reward.

Well the sum of it all is verse 23, which I read earlier, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely.” That’s the prayer. That’s where we’re all going in this pastoral work, we’re trying to get you to entire sanctification. So the work is never done. It’s not done in my life; it’s not done in yours.

His prayer, “May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete without blame at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” When Jesus comes, you will be perfect. But in the meantime, we want to do everything we can to get you there as pure and holy and blameless as possible. That’s what shepherds are called to do. That’s our calling, the perfection of the saints.

I watched the U-Tube video of a very, very popular speaker in a place that’s called a church in the south, thousands of people go there. And he said this, “If you’ve been saved, get out of this church. We’re done with you. We’re done with you. This isn’t for you, leave. Get out.”

Well there are certainly a lot of things he doesn’t understand but one of them is, whatever he thinks he is, he’s not fulfilling the role of the shepherd of God’s flock.

In verse 26, Paul says, “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.” That was kind of a cheek-to-cheek deal; you might call it a holy hug. So before you go, this morning, give somebody a holy hug, it belongs to a Thessalonian kind of church.

Father, we thank You for Your grace to us in Christ. We thank You for a wonderful time of fellowship and worship. Thank You for the gift that You have given to us in this church, for all that it has come to mean to us and for many who are so new, all that it will come to mean as the days move ahead to the return of Christ. Strengthen our faith and our love and our hope. May we stand firm and enjoy the blessing that You’ve given to us. Continue to give us eyes and ears to see and hear and a heart to reach out to the lost both here and across the world. And may we be a people who intercede for our church and may the prayer that Paul prayed not only be my prayer for this church but the prayer of all of us, that You would perfect what is lacking in our faith, and love, and hope, and carry us till our Lord sees us face-to-face and stand before Him blameless in His presence.

We pray that You’ll do a work in every heart. We’re all in this journey somewhere along the line, many new believers here, many just beginning to understand the richness of truth. Help them to grow like babes desiring milk and to grow strong. Help, Father, those who have grown cold, though they’ve been a long time around the truth. Give them a new passion for those things that please and honor You. Use this church to the glory of our Savior, to proclaim His name and His gospel we pray. Amen.

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).