LSB 2 Thessalonians 3:16 - 18

16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually give you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 17 The greeting is in my own hand—Paul, which is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

This morning we will finish the rich study we have enjoyed in the dual letters to the saints at Thessalonica. Just 3 remaining verses and I was curious if it would be difficult to find a 40 minute study in these things.

But as I began to look at just these 3 simple verses as Paul gives his final conclusive thoughts and wishes and prayer for them, I see that within what Paul wishes for these folks is the very thing that sustains us for a lifetime as christians. Peace.

I think we'll find here some ballast for our little sail boats that can hold us upright when the winds of life threaten to tip us over and sink us. Peace is why we stay. Peace is what separates real christians from the rest of the world around us. God's peace can sustain us while cataclysms surround us.

We recall a conversation between Jesus and His disciples in John chapter 6 when the multitudes decided they'd had just about enough of Jesus teaching and the multitude departed, and Jesus asks His chosen disciples;

"*Do you also want to go?" 68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 69 And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God*." John 6:67b - 69

For those of us who know and walk with Jesus through His indwelling Holy Spirit who lives inside our hearts, we can only say, with the disciples, where would we go? We have experienced the Holy One of God, dwelling with us, in us. Where would we go?

There is more than just real peace in that statement, but not less. Let's take

a look at this idea of peace. A biblical understanding of peace. What it is and perhaps is not, and where it originates from.

Peace is an attribute of God. Peace, real peace can only come from one place. It emanates from God onto those with whom He is pleased. Like the misquoted verse at Jesus birth. Peace on earth, good will towards men. But the greek construction is;

14 "*Glory to God in the highest,*
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." Luke 2:14

That's right out of the new LSB. Peace is possible, if He is pleased with you. Jesus made that a possibility at least. But there is no peace for men who are at war with God. None. Not possible. Jesus blood removes sin and then there is peace. God's peace.

God is the owner of all created things, both those at war and rebellion against Him and those things not at war in creation that glorify Him. Peace comes from God. It belongs to Him, derives from Him, and is dependent upon either His pleasure or His wrath.

Biblically you can argue for a trinitarian God with this simple idea of peace. We say with John, God is Love. God is the essence of His attributes. One of God's attributes is love, so we say God IS love.

Likewise we can say God IS peace. God is peace and He is the source of all true peace. 1Thessalonians 5:23 says, "The God of peace," so does Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, 2Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 4:9, and Hebrews 13:20 among a few.

Then in our passage this morning we see that Paul prays for peace to come from the Lord of Peace. That's Jesus. So we have the God of peace and the Lord of peace. Same source. Same person.

Jesus told His disciples; *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you;*

not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. John 14:27

Jesus says He is in fact the God of peace. He tells the disciples God's peace is MY peace to give. Ephesians 2:14 says, "*Christ who is our peace*." The old testament calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. God of Peace. Lord of Peace, same person.

Then we learn in Galatians 5 that one of the fruits of the Spirit is what? Peace. Love, Joy, Peace. Fruits given to us by the Holy Spirit. Spirit of peace.

Peace emmanates from God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all equally the source of peace.

In all of creation there is only one owner of everything, and all peace derives from Him in relation to His ownership, His lordship. If we step out of God's will we then have declared war with God. Peace is broken. If we are at war with the source of peace in all creation, there can be no peace.

God is the God of peace for all who dwell within His peace. Sin breaks that peace.

Isa. 59: 1 *Behold, the hand of Yahweh is not so short*
That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear.
2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,
And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

Sin is a barrier between sinners and the source of all peace. Peace is broken. Peace, real peace is out of reach for sinners. And yet, God is gracious even to sinners during their brief stay on earth. He sends rain to the just who are at peace with Him, and also to the unjust who are at war with Him. God witholds vengeance. For a time. There is a level of peace, even in a fallen dangerous world.

In His wisdom and for the purposes of His patient love for His creation God has declared sort of a partial cease fire with His enemies, all who have rebelled, born into Adam's sin. A temporary cease fire. In this world. Until death.

Hebrews 9:27 says; 27 *And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment*,

Judgement waits for death. Wrath waits for death. This life is a ceasefire while God patiently woos and waits for repentence from rebellers. Judgement and wrath come after death.

That causes an interesting phenomenon. A false conception of what is actually only a ceasefire, lost men think there is peace.

Listen to Isaiah 57. *19 Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near," Says Yahweh, "and I will heal him."*
20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea,
For it cannot be quiet,
And its waters toss up refuse and mud.
21 "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

No peace for sinners. They may have some kind of circumstantial peace, a thriving within the cease fire period, but God says, There is no peace for the wicked. It's an illusion.

Thomas Watson the 1600's puritan preacher said; "*The seeming peace a sinner has is not from the knowledge of his happiness, but the ignorance of his danger*."

The world thinks there is peace, but it's only an illusion for those who are lucky enough to dwell in good circumstances. Johnathan Edwards was right when he says in his sermon "*Sinners in the hands of an angry God*" that those alive in this world are dangling over hell holding onto the thinnest of ropes.

There is no peace, only a temporary cease fire. Judgement awaits all who have not had their sins washed away in the blood of Jesus.

When we understand our predicament and the enormous cost to God, His only Son, to purchase us out of wrath and rebellion, and we understand that real peace only comes from God for those who have embraced redemption through faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, in our place, it gives new clarity to what Paul prays for his beloved spiritual children at Thessalonica. Suddenly Paul's words have enormous weight.

16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually give you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!

Paul begins his closing words with the word now. *Now may the Lord of peace . . .* His use of the word now indicates we have left the former discussion behind us and have begun a new phase, the final phase. These are closing thoughts. All of the polemics are finished. All of the problems are addressed. The orders have been given.

These final words fall to the entire congregation. They go hand in hand with vs. 13: *But as for you, brothers, do not lose heart in doing good*. Some of the folks had to endure a verbal spanking. To the rest who aren't a part of the problem, he says, you folks are doing good, carry on, don't lose heart.

The closing remarks are directed at the whole group. The problems will be corrected, or else. Now Paul shifts from negative necessity to positive joy. *Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually give you peace*

Paul's wish and prayer is for these beloved saints to enjoy true peace, real peace. And as we've already discovered, that peace has a source. So Paul says *Now may the* ***Lord of peace Himself*** *continually give you peace*

Peace. Inner peace. Wellness. We need to do some self assessment. Is

our peace circumstantial peace? or God's peace? Of this world, or not of this world?

When the perfect storm comes, is our peace durable or is it fragile? Check your soul. Like David did as he addresses his own inner soul. *Why art thou cast down oh my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Trust thou in God, For I shall yet praise him For the help of his countenance*. Psa 42:5

Some day in eternity future we may ask the question, was America, this grand experiment that resulted in the greatest thriving in all of history, was it from God, or did Satan stand before God and gain permission for a level of thriving and ease that caused entire generations to think "It is well with my soul" because of the good circumstances even though the peace was only temporary.

We have everything. Ease. Comfort. Wealth. Security. Health. Opportunity. Is that a formula for false peace. Circumstantial peace?

Look around you. If indeed Satan did stand before God and received permission for this level of circumstantial peace within a temporary cease fire, we'd have to give him credit for a brilliant plan.

In 2023, in our land, God has been relegated to long lost memory. We don't need or want Him. Dismissed. Thown on the trash heap. We've moved on. We're progressive. Goodbye God, and good riddance. We enjoy absolute personal autonomy. You are hereby declared free of God and His old fashioned rules and God is replaced by YOU. You're God. You decide what's right or wrong. You decide what gender you are.

No Fear . . . of God is the worlds effort at peace. There is no God. There is no judge. There is no recompense for my evil. If I can somehow convince myself, then peace is possible? Eliminate God in the quest for some kind of peace. It's a mind game on a mass level. Then we play, I'll condone your evil if you'll condone mine.

Hey we're doing fine and the sky's the limit. The arrogance is shocking. Stunning really. If America 2023 is the result of satanic design, we'll have to give him credit for coming up with a wickedness that surpasses Sodom and Gomorrah while the citizens have an illusory peace like never before.

So my question, driven by Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians is this; Is your peace real or is it circumstantial. Is it inside you, Holy Spirit generated, in your heart, or is it merely circumstantial because we enjoy a false peace in this land.

If the hammer comes down and christianity, actually I'll be more definitive, because christianity is everything and nothing these days, if the hammer comes down on those who cling to the authority of the morality of a living God, revealed to us in His word, His book, and suddenly all of the temporal blessings are removed, will your inner peace remain?

My fear is that the evangelicalism I've witnessed in the mega-church phenomenon in the 3rd decade of the 21st century in our land is the latter. Circumstantial peace in a land of plenty. False peace.

All the more reason for us to understand and consider the source of true peace, and to question whether or not what we have is real, and durable. A peace that doesn't come from fine circumstances, but a peace deep in our souls, given to us by the Lord of Peace, Himself, who promised us, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*. Heb. 13:5

The source of real peace is independent from this world and whatever peace or non peace is happening here. And the source lives in every christians heart. And He who is our peace has promised He will never leave us or forsake us.

Habakkuk was a prophet in Israel in a time of rampant sin and injustice by the leadership there. A dark time in Israel. And Habakkuk sort of shouts his own disapproval of the level of wickedness at God. How long are you

going to let this go on? How long are you going to allow the injustices!

And God comes back with an answer. I'm going to bring the Syrians down and they're going to wipe out everything. Israel will be decimated. And then Habakkuk is aghast. Not the answer he was looking for. He wanted God to fix it, not destroy it! Habakkuk says to God, the Syrians are a magnitude more evil than we are!

How can you use people who are more evil than the evil you're going to judge. That was God's plan and His answer. But within the conversation between God and Habakkuk a wave of peace sweeps over Habakkuk even though he understands, everything's going to be gone. Israel isn't going to be fixed, it's going to be destroyed. But in that destruction, peace is present

These are the final words of the prophet Habakkuk;
16 I heard, and my inward parts trembled;
At the sound my lips tingled.
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble.
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
For the people to arise who will invade us.
17 Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no produce on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields yield no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
18 Yet I will exult in Yahweh;
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
19 Yahweh, the Lord, is my strength,
And He has set my feet like hinds' feet
And makes me tread on my high places. Habbakuk 3:16 - 19

God's peace is a peace that is independent of the situations in the world that surrounds us. Paul's wish and prayer is for God's peace, The peace of the

Lord of peace Himself to be present for these folks at Thessalonica which was openly hostile to these new believers who were turning the world upside down.

Then Paul completes his prayer for a transcendent peace, an otherworldly peace, a peace not dependent upon this world as it's source, by commending the source of the peace be present with them.

16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually give you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!

We love to recount the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to our Sunday school children. But here, Paul is virtually praying for the same reality those Israelites enjoyed to be ours in every circumstance.

22 *For this reason, because the king's word was urgent and the furnace had been heated to an extraordinary degree, the flame of the fire killed those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. 23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up. 24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and hurriedly stood up; he answered and said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast tied up into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "Certainly, O king." 25 He answered and said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!"* Daniel 3

I've previously quoted the Lord's promise to never leave us or forsake us. Might I add here that while these men were being tied up and constrained to each other in their full clothing before they were thrown into the furnace of fire, that the fourth person was always present with them, though not seen until they were cast into the flames. Only then did the king count four, not three men.

Our predicament, and I share it equally with you all, is that we've never

known any level of adversity or pressure against us in our experience in this world. If and when it comes, and many, not just me, believe we're watching a tidal wave boiling towards shore even as we speak, when that adversity arrives, we have no previous practice of clinging to the Lord of Peace within a cataclysmic storm.

What we do know is that the Lord of peace is bigger than any storm. Again we go to the old testament which is rich in object lessons for us to try to understand all that we may experience of these promises.

For the sake of time, a little context. Ahab is king and the wicked Jezebel has threatened to murder Elijah, and so Elijah flees into the wilderness in 1 Kings 19, the desert, and there he wishes for his own death.

And there an angel wakes him and there is food and water for him, and he goes to a cave at Mount Horeb, and there God speaks to him;

9 Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 And he said, "I have been very zealous for Yahweh, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, pulled down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." 11 So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before Yahweh." And behold, Yahweh was passing by! And a great and strong wind was tearing up the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before Yahweh; but Yahweh was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake. 12 Then after the earthquake a fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a thin gentle whisper. 13 Now it happened that when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Paul says to the Thessalonian christians, and to us; *The Lord be with you all*.

The world around Elijah was literally coming apart. A wind that was fierce enough to break the rocks in pieces. An earthquake that shook the whole world around Elijah, and a fire that burned everything up. That was the world around Elijah. A terrifying world. But then a still small voice.

A tiny whisper from God is bigger than surrounding circumstances that literally melt the mountains in your midst. If we have the Lord with us, the world can literally come apart around us, and we can be in the calm of a whisper. The wind and the earthquake and the fire can literally melt the mountains down to dust and we can be calm in the midst of that, if the Lord is with us. A whisper from Him trumps mountains melting like wax.

Paul's wish and prayer for these believers is bigger than anything the world can throw at them. Peace and fellowship with God of very God. Let the mountains melt away like wax, as long as we have that.

Then Paul signs his letter. This is the final signature in vs. 17

17 The greeting is in my own hand—Paul, which is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.

Paul may have had vision challenges. We don't know. He mentions that the Galatians would have given him their very eyes if that were possible; Galatians 4:15, KJV: *Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me*.

So for that reason or others we don't know about, Paul would have had an amanuensis, a secretary, who took the dictation and wrote down the letter as dictated by Paul.

But without Paul's signature, anyone could bring a letter and claim it was from Paul. This signature is the binding proof that an apostolic authority hand picked by Jesus is giving us truth's revealed by the inspiration of God.

Centuries later, when the original autograph's are long gone, smart guys come along and have a lot of reasons why none of this is actually written by Paul or anyone else that it claims for authorship.

It's something Satan uses to try to pull the rug out from underneath authority. Question everything's authenticity. Me, I choose to have faith in the church fathers that over the first centuries assembled the canon of scriptures agreed upon to be authentic and inspired and who also rejected other writings with false claims that were trying to wiggle their way in.

For me at least, what Paul just told these folks is as good as if I was staring at the original document with a big squiggly "Paul", "this is how I write." In my minds eye I can see that plain as day. There's no convincing the folks who think their reasoning powers trump the accepted canon of scripture. That's the arrogance of smart people.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Finally this last word. Peace be with you above, and then this last sentence. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Is there an echo in the room? What's the difference between peace be with you and grace be with you. Isn't it the same thing?

In a way, yes, but in another way, no. Peace is the riches of a right relationship with God poured out on us. The peace of God is more valuable than all the riches in the world. That peace is a gift that we will enjoy, with Christ, in eternity, forever.

More valuable than the whole world. *What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul*? Mark 8:36

That was the deal the devil offered Jesus in the temptation. Worship me and I'll give you all these kingdoms and their glory. What nonsense. Go to war with God the father over this broken down rubbish? I think not.

Our peace with God was a gift. We couldn't do anything to earn peace with God. It's a gift more valuable than all the kingdoms of this world.

The difference between peace and grace is that grace reminds us that we were bankrupt when God poured out on us wealth more valuable than all the kingdoms on this planet put together. We received God's peace because of God's grace.

Grace reminds us that we deserved wrath but God poured out on us, all of the wealth that belonged to His Son. Inner peace, God's peace is possible because of God's grace to us.