



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

How God's People "Get Ready"

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 11
Tim Badal | March 20, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 5:23–28



Before we take a break next week for the celebration of Easter, we want to finish the last couple verses in 1 Thessalonians. Next week we'll be talking about what it means to second-guess or doubt the resurrection. We'll be looking at the life of Thomas and how he responded to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many people respond to the resurrection with doubts and questions, and we learn from Thomas' story how Jesus resolves questions we have about what He has done and can do for each of us.

Before we get there though, we want to finish this first letter to the Thessalonians. Then in two weeks we'll pick up with the second letter. We'll spend the month of April in that book, finishing this series we started in January that we called "Ready." We've been learning what Paul is telling these first-century Christians about what it means to live readied lives for Christ.

In this five-chapter letter, we've learned that readiness includes living pure lives, living lives filled with brotherly or sisterly love. It includes the idea of putting our lives in order under the Word of God, and living in such a way that the gospel resonates in all facets of our lives. Whether at work, school, in our neighborhoods or all around the world, we need to be ready. One of the reasons for this is that Jesus Christ is coming back and we need to be ready for that. We need to be prepared, recognizing that He will not come back until He has given us the full amount of time to share the gospel so all whom He has called will come to a saving knowledge of Himself. We want to be part of that, engaging that endeavor for His name and glory.

We find ourselves today at the very end of the first letter. Paul does not disappoint us by finishing this letter with simple, pleasant platitudes or idle talk. He finishes strongly, helping us understand what it means to be ready. But there may have been some in that first-century congregation who—when listening to this letter being read—began to think it was a lot for him to ask of them. They might be saying, "Paul, does God really want me to be involved in all these things—even commanding me to do them? Spiritually speaking, I can barely get up in the morning and keep my life together. It seems that what God is calling me to is much more than that. I'm not sure I can do it all."

Or there may have been those in the congregation who were doubting whether or not they could do these things. They flat-out knew they couldn't do them. To them it seemed impossible. "There's no way I can do it. I have so much sin, so many issues, in my life. There's no way I'm going to be able to fulfill what God has for me."

Well, no matter where you are on this spectrum, Paul has a word for every one of us. He is telling us we can be ready, we should be ready, and we will be ready if we are children of God. Why? Because God is going to see to it that all of that is taken care of and that we understand all it involves. But God wants to guarantee something: you will be holy. He's not saying that as a threat, but as a promise. You and I will be holy just as our God in heaven is holy. He says, "I'm in the process of making people holy."

What we'll learn today is that the One Who promises is truly faithful. So let's read 1 Thessalonians 5:23–28:

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. ²⁵ Brothers, pray for us. ²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. ²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul had written this letter to the people of Thessalonica—in what is now modern-day Greece. They had just come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and were new to their walk with Him. Their changed lives were something of great significance. They had previously followed the gods of Greek mythology and had been down all the rabbit trails through which those gods would lead people. They never knew where they stood with any of those gods. If it rained on their picnic day, they knew one of the gods was mad, but weren't sure which one, nor did they know what they were supposed to do. To cover their bases, they would pay homage to all the gods, hoping to appease all of them. They never knew what these gods thought of them.

But the Thessalonian people had turned from those gods to the one living and true God, and they had given their lives over to Him. But their question was this: "What happens when I mess up? What happens when I anger this God? What happens when I don't do what this God wants me to do? Is He going to 'rain on my parade'? Is He going to make my life incredibly difficult? Is He going to throw a fit and ruin my life?"

Paul says, "Listen. You've got a lot to work on here. There are many things you need to be doing, a lot of evidences in your lives that you are following Jesus Christ. But before I close this letter, I want to remind you that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is different from Zeus or Apollo. He isn't feckless. He isn't given to all this capricious, adolescent behavior. No, the God we serve is a God Who promises some things, and His promises assure us that when we give our lives over to Him, the process that takes place between salvation and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ—our glorification—is a process that in His mind is already completed."

We do still struggle and deal with many issues and questions, but God says, "You're going to make it to the finish line. I have no doubt in My mind, because I am the One Who is behind you. You don't have to wonder where you stand with Me. I love and care for you, and I will see you from the beginning line all the way to the end. I will be there with open arms when you get there."

So Paul begins to address the theological understanding of this process called sanctification. Many of us began our walk with God when we heard the preaching of His Word, when we bowed the knee to Him. We realized, "I can't live for myself anymore. I have to live for the Savior Who came and died for me."

Many of you gave your lives to Jesus through a prayer or a profession of faith at some church service. You said, "God, I need You in my life, and I want to live for You. Jesus, I want You to lead me." We call that justification, and in that moment the sinner becomes a saint—not because of anything he or she has done, but because of the "imputed righteousness" of Christ. Christ exchanges His perfection for our sin. He takes our sin, and we then have His righteousness on us—and positionally, we are perfect.

But the problem is we don't live that way, do we? Whereas justification occurs in a moment—a certain place in time—sanctification is a process. Then at the end of the Christian life—as we learned when we considered the Second Coming of Jesus Christ—Christians will experience a third change. Not justification, not progressive sanctification, but our ultimate glorification. That is where God will take our lowly bodies and in "a twinkling of an eye" will make them to be like Christ's resurrected body. The Bible says we will see Him and know Him because we have been fully known. There will be such a complete transformation that we will become like Him; not as gods, but in the sense that we will understand Him in full intimacy, similar to the relationship Adam and Eve had with God in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

Now, between those two transformations—justification and glorification—is a journey, the process we call sanctification, wherein we are made holy. There are many approaches to understanding this process. I want to describe for you a metaphor that I have found helpful.

Salvation begins like a shoreline on a large body of water. On the other side—far along the horizon, as far as the eye can barely see—is another shore, our glorification. We know it's there, and we are told that we should look forward to going there. But we have a problem. There's a great sea that divides the two shores. How do we get from being saved here to being glorified in the age to come? It's the process in which we all find ourselves right now: sanctification. There are three ways to understand this journey from justification to glorification.

First is what you might call the "powerboat" approach. In this view, you are in a vessel and realize you have a long way to travel. So you decide to look for something or someone who can get you from Point A to Point B really quickly. Some of us as Christians have seen our salvation as a purchasing of the needed equipment to get us to Point B. Jesus became the boat motor that we attached to our vessel so we would get to our destiny.

Here's the problem with that understanding: when you do that, you're not doing any of the work. The motor is doing all the work. Yet the Scriptures describe the work of sanctification as literally being work. *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,"* Paul tells us in Philippians 2:12. But some of us have simply seen our salvation in Jesus as something we "hook on" to our lives. We don't intend to change the way we live or what we do. Instead we think, "Jesus is going to be my insurance policy to get me to Point B, and I'll just enjoy my ride along the way." Yet the Bible makes it clear that while Jesus is the One Who helps us get through the process of sanctification, He's not the only part. We play a part as well.

So the second group might be called the "rowboat" group. In the view of the rowboat group, Christianity is hard work. They think, "What I need to do is get in my boat and start rowing. While those people are enjoying the 'free life,' I will get through to sanctification by hard work." You'll recognize these people because they're tired and sweaty. They say things like this: "There's no greater job than to be a Christian. Even though my life is miserable and I'm tired, the joy of the Lord is my strength." They're weary, but they're thinking, "If I just keep rowing, I'll get there." They're cramping up and angry. Many of them grow tired and give up.

The rowboat people look at the powerboat people and say, "They're not doing it right. That's not real Christianity." These two groups oppose each other. A rowboat person sees where they are on the beginning shoreline, they look across to the shore on the far horizon, thinking, "All those powerboat people are just partying and enjoying themselves on the boat, thinking Jesus is going to do it all for them."

You see, neither the powerboat nor the rowboat people are living the way God calls us so we can become holy. So what's the right approach? How do we get from our salvation—which was given freely by Jesus Christ—to our ultimate glorification in the age to come? The answer is the sailboat approach. This group recognizes that God plays a part in our sanctification, but so do we. It's incomplete for us to sit in the boat and let God do all the work. Likewise, it's incomplete for us to think we'll row our way from one shore to the other, while God is absent from that process.

The sailboat group combines the two approaches. When they're on one side of the sea and want to get to the other, the people on the boat start managing the sails. They set the sails up, making sure they're not tangled or fettered so they can go up the mast. They make sure there are no holes in the sails, because if there are holes, the wind will go right through them. In other words, there's maintenance occurring. There's positioning going on by those who are in the vessel.

But here's the problem: a sailboat doesn't move unless there's wind. I know I have a lot of hot air, but I can't move a boat. So I have to recognize that regardless of all the boat maintenance I can do, the journey still depends on one thing: by His Holy Spirit, God has to breathe the winds that move me from Point A to Point B. I've got work to do, but likewise God must show up. Listen carefully. God must show up in your life to make you holy—but He calls every one of us to be properly positioned so that when He shows up, we're moving. We're ready for His work in our lives.

So the sailboat analogy is the best analogy to explain the process of sanctification. Some of you might be wondering right now why the ship isn't moving the way it needs to, right? You're thinking, "I should be getting closer to that point. It seems I'm as far away as I was yesterday." One thing is certain. God says He is faithful. The wind will be there. So the question isn't, "Is God doing His job?" Maybe my sails aren't set in the direction they need to be. Maybe there are some holes in the sails. Maybe there are some problems with the vessel that I need to address.

1. In order to get ready, we must engage with the Person Who makes holiness possible.

At the end of this letter, Paul gives—in the most beautiful fashion—the sailboat analogy of what sanctification looks like. God plays His part, but you play a part as well. If you want to get from one place to the other, notice what he says. First, you must engage with the Person Who makes holiness possible. Holiness is not possible apart from the work of God. Verse 23 says, *"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely."*

How does one become holy? How does one become ready? The idea of readiness could really be synonymous with holiness. Are you ready? Well, let me ask you: are you holy? Christ is coming back and on that day He will ask, "Will I find faith? Will I find holiness? Will I find a readied people at My coming?" (Luke 18:8).

This is seen through the Source. Where does it come from?

How do we become holy? The answer is God. It is God Who enables holiness and readiness in the lives of His people. Anyone who's walking with God is undergoing a makeover. It began at our salvation, then God continues to do His work. But if you're like me, you're feeling the makeover isn't taking place. Some of your issues and struggles seem to result in more of the same. You need to recognize that God's process for holiness is not a once-and-for-all endeavor, but a progressive, day-after-day journey. There will be days when you'll see more progress, and then there'll be days when frankly you feel like you're regressing. But Paul says the way we tap into holiness is through God Himself.

Look at what the Bible says. Can we be sanctified through our own strength, or through the strength of another person? Does it say if we work really, really hard, we can be holy? If we clean ourselves up really, really well, we will be holy. If we cut those things out of our lives, then we'll really, really be holy. No. Here's the problem: sinners can't make sinners holy. I can do everything in my power and I'm still going to be a sinner. I'm still going to be unholy. It's utterly futile to think I can make myself holy.

Think of it this way: Every once in a while I change the oil in my cars. I think it's only going to cost \$30, but I get so frustrated with the whole process, I go back to the professionals. Here's why. Inevitably I get oil on my hands. What do I do when that happens? Well, I go to the oil pan, dip my hands in the oil and try to get the first oil off. I'm thinking, if I have a little oil on my hands, well, more oil is going to fix the problem, right? No, it's just going to make me dirtier. A lot of us think, "I can fix this. I can do it." No. You've got oil on your hands; more oil isn't going to help. You need someone to come with some sort of cleaning agent that breaks through the oil and removes it from your hands without making you messier in the process.

That's what God did through His Son Jesus Christ on the cross. That's why we celebrate Easter the way we do. Christ came, and we had this dirty life and heart; we tried through all our endeavors to clean ourselves up. But the only thing that did was make us dirtier. So now we're filthy. Christ comes along and says, "I have exactly what you need to be cleaned up." As He's wiping us clean of all this ungodliness and sin, we are no longer seeing the stains of our sin and wrong living. We start seeing holiness—a cleanness we've never seen before.

Who does it? God. Notice the answer Paul gives: we've got to tap into God. But first of all, God takes the responsibility for our cleansing on to Himself. *"Now may the God of peace Himself..."* God doesn't give the job to His employees. It isn't a job He gives to the angels or to the church pastors or your mom and dad. God says, "I'm going to roll up My sleeves and I'm going to see to it that this job gets done."

As a man who has employees, as one who is a boss in a small business, here's what I want you to know. If there's an important job to do in a business, if there's an important customer to serve, you don't send the employee. You do it yourself, because the task is so important, so connected to everything you're doing, that you're not going to trust it with anyone else but yourself. God, in a perfect way, says, "I'm not going to give this to an angel or a prophet or a human being. I'm going to do this job Myself."

Jesus Christ, being God, put on flesh and made His dwelling among us (John 1:14). Why? So He could do this job Himself. The book of Hebrews says He could have sent an angel, but He didn't. He could have allowed one of the prophets to do it, but He didn't. Far better than the prophets, far better than the angels, is the Boss, Jesus Christ. He does it. So when you are being made holy, you need to understand that this is a work of God. He's entered into it and He delights in it. He takes responsibility for it.

Notice a couple other things: there's a result that takes place. *"Now may the God of peace...."* What does that mean? Why in this passage on sanctification, of all the names of God, would Paul announce that God is a God of peace? He could have said, "And the God of wrath," or "the God of justice," or "the God of love" or "the God of fulfilled promises." No, he starts with this title: the God of peace.

This phrase tells us that as you are being made holy, as I am being made holy, God recognizes that peace often is not part of the process. We don't have peace when we sin. We don't have peace when we're out in the sea and our ship has been sitting in the same place for a long time. We don't know what's wrong. We're trying to figure it out. We don't know where the sails are supposed to go. We don't know how to fix the broken sail. We're sitting there and we lack peace. We lack assurance and become anxious. We begin to wonder, "Am I going to be ready for that moment when I stand before Jesus? Am I going to have the answer for Him?" Or is He going to find someone so messed up that He says I'm beyond hope?

Paul says, “He’s a God of peace.” There are a couple things we should know about peace. First, God is at peace with you. He’s not at war with you in this process. So if you’re a child of God, but you’ve sinned, and you think God’s wrath and judgment are coming down on you, then you have misunderstood the Scriptures. The Bible says we are children of God whom He loves; not objects of His wrath—even when we sin.

That’s seen over and over again in Christ’s interactions with His followers when they blow it. Peter blows it before the crucifixion. Three times he denies Christ, and three times after the resurrection Christ forgives him and sends him off in a new direction (John 18:25–27; John 21:15–19). We need to recognize that we have a God of peace. He’s not at war with us.

During our sanctification process, this idea of a God of peace allows us to be at peace with Him, but also to be at peace with ourselves. We don’t have to be anxious, or wonder if God will be with us through this journey of sanctification. God is saying, “I’m here. I love you. I care for you. I want to see the best in your life. I want to walk you from Point A to Point B, and I want you never to worry.” He wants us to be assured of our salvation. He wants us to know He’s the God of peace. The other thing I want you to know about this term “God of peace” is that He is the One watching you live your life.

Now, for those who have multiple kids here, you recognize that you freaked out with the first one. C’mon, be honest. At some point I’m going to have to apologize to Noah. We freaked out about everything. First time he was sick, we headed to the hospital. First time he fell on the ground, we wrapped him in a full body cast. We were doing everything. But when the third child rolled around, we really didn’t care all that much. Luke falls—we say, “Get up!” “But my leg’s broken.” “You’ll be fine. Walk it off.” Why? Because we’re at peace. We recognize that when you drop a baby, the baby’s going to be.... I’m just kidding. You’ve been down that road before so you don’t have to freak out. There’s peace.

I want you to know something. God is not sitting there watching us live our lives and when we blow it, and He’s like, “Oh, my! Did you see what that guy did? What are We going to do about it? There’s no answer in the rule book about that. That’s heinous! Not even a mother can overlook that.” He doesn’t do that. He says, “I’m God. I know you’re disobedient. I know you’re going to go your own way. I know you’re going to do these things.”

Listen. What you do today is no different than what they were doing in Thessalonica in the first century, or what was happening in the Old Testament with the Jewish people. So God’s not freaking out. God’s in the business of getting Christians from Point A to Point B. You’re going to make it in the journey. He’s the God of peace.

This is seen through the Scope. What does it cover?

Paul addresses the scope and answers the question: what does the process of sanctification cover? Verse 23 says, “*The God of peace will sanctify....*” The word ‘sanctify’ literally means to set one apart. So God has set us apart—not to live our lives for ourselves or for our pleasures, but to live our lives according to the precepts and plans of God. That’s what makes the Christian and non-Christian different. We’re not different because we live or work in different places. The difference is that for a non-believer, the elevator of decision-making rises only to their own head. “Joe, what do you think about this subject?” That’s as high as the elevator goes for him.

For Christians, the elevator goes way beyond us. In fact, it’s one of those express elevators that goes from the decision in front of us and zooms right past us to God Himself. In fact, when Tim gets involved in the decision—that’s the problem. Instead, I need to take it to the highest level and ask, “God, what would You say about this decision? How do You want me to spend my money? How do You want me to treat my wife? How do You want me to treat my employees? How do You want me to serve You?” It doesn’t stop with my answering those questions. They’re answered by God Himself.

Paul wants his readers to recognize something: “You are going to be sanctified...partially.” Some translations may say “half-way.” Right? No. Look at the text: “*sanctified completely.*” Completely. The word is *holoteles*, which describes something that is completely done. Not found wanting. Not found unsound. It implies the entirety of completion. What God is doing in your life, according to Paul, will be done through and through.

Now, this idea of “completely” entails a couple things. First, if you’re a child of God, on the day of glorification—when everybody’s on the other side of the sea partying and having a great time in heaven in their glorified state—you won’t be sitting in your little dinghy saying, “What about me? Did You forget me? I’m over here, God.” God won’t be saying, “You know, We’re missing somebody. Who didn’t have a buddy?” No, you’re going to make it. I know a lot of you feel right now, “There’s no way I’m going to do it.” But God says, “I’m going to get you there. It’s going to be done completely.”

Second, not only will you make it to the finish line, but Paul goes on to say, *“And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* I realize that for those who are more theologically savvy, the idea of body, soul and spirit draws up the whole question of the composition of man. Are we made of three parts or two parts? Is he body, soul and spirit, or is he immaterial and material? There is great debate on these questions. I don't buy that this text is dealing with the composition of a man.

What I think Paul is saying is this: just as we are totally depraved in our sin, with sin running through our veins, there's not a part of our being that isn't affected by sin. Every part of Tim is sinful. My thinking is sinful. My actions are sinful. My mouth is sinful. My attitudes about people are sinful. My decision-making is sinful. My preferences are sinful. There's not a part of Tim I can point to and say, *“That's the holy part, the part that's right with God.”* I'm totally depraved. And so are you, by the way. But God says, *“I'm going to fix it.”*

Now I don't mean this illustration to be a gender issue, but I do hear it more with ladies that they work out to fix a certain area on their bodies. There's that certain area they want fixed and hopefully—God help us, husbands—we tell them they don't need to fix that part. As they work out, we'll hear over and over again that one part of the body doesn't change. And it brings great disappointment. They come to the realization, *“I can try, but it will never be fixed.”*

But spiritually, God is saying this: *“There's not a stubborn part of your sinfulness that I'm not going to fix.”* When God touches a certain part of your life, it always changes. It always gets fixed. God is not going to introduce us to our friends in heaven and say, *“Ah, here's Tim. He's great. But overlook that part of his body, because We couldn't fix that. I did everything I could. I even talked to Mr. Clean, and he brought out his eraser, but that didn't get rid of it either.”* No, God's going to present us *“blameless.”*

2. In order to get ready, we must engage with the promise that calms our concerns.

Now, we're not there yet, so notice what God does. He gives a promise: *“May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”* This promise calms our concerns. Some of us are thinking, *“I'm never going to figure this thing out. I'm never going to be ready to meet God. I'm scared about meeting Him.”* God says, *“You don't need to be scared or worried about the what-ifs.”* Many of us read Scriptures like this and we doubt. Concerns flood our hearts and minds. *“Sure, God is great and He will do His work, but surely He can't fix this in my life.”*

I was talking with a former employee of mine recently who came to know Christ as an adult, but she had lived a pretty wild life before that. She was coming to thank me for the role I played in her life as a Christian boss. She had also gotten some news about some things that had happened in her past, some consequences of sin that are now creeping back into her life. Maybe that has happened to you—the ramifications of your past stupid decisions have come back. It's a terrible feeling when something you think is long gone creeps back into your life.

This previous employee had just gotten news that it had happened to her. She was sitting in my office in tears, saying, *“Maybe this is God's wrath. Maybe I blew it too badly. Maybe even God can't fix my sin.”* I said, *“You came to the right place with your questions. Here's what 1 Thessalonians 5 says: God is going to sanctify you completely, and you're going to be kept blameless.”* I then walked through point number two with her. *“God has promised some things to you. Don't worry. Don't ask the what-ifs. Don't be caught in the bondage of your sin, wondering if God can fix this. He already has through the work of Christ on the cross.”*

God's Word says our standing is secure.

I want you to notice a couple things Paul says next. Number one: if you're a child of God, your standing is secure. You will be kept blameless. This little word 'blameless' in the Greek came from the legal arena, meaning you have been acquitted in a court of law. It's sad to have to admit this, but I've stood before a couple judges in my life. One time I had gotten in trouble as a high school student. My father went with me to court and the judge asked me, *“Mr. Badal, how do you plead?”* I wanted to say, *“Not guilty.”* I paused. But my father, who was standing behind me, said, *“Judge, he's as guilty as sin!”*

Let me tell you something. Bill Badal's the worst defense attorney you could ever have. The judge smiles. He likes it. So he stops talking to me. This is a true story—no exaggeration. He stops talking to me, looks at my dad, and says, *“Well, how would you rule?”* *“Whatever you were going to give him, I'd give him ten times that.”* I went from 50 hours of community service—do

the math—to 500. I was guilty. In that courtroom there was a person who knew I was guilty and made sure everybody was aware of it. Let me tell you something as a side note: you should have seen the other kids who were with their parents. You could just imagine them thinking, “God help you, Mom or Dad, if you say anything when I’m standing up there!”

Listen, when you stand before Jesus as a child of God, Bill Badal isn’t going to yell, “You’re guilty as sin.” Your spouse isn’t going to yell, “You’re guilty as sin.” Your enemy is not going to yell, “Guilty as sin.” Even more importantly—listen to me—the devil will not say, “You’re as guilty as sin.” Jesus will be standing next to you and in that moment He will put His arm around you—I’m speculating a bit, but give me some leeway here—and He’s going to say, “You know what, Father—Judge? He’s with Me. He’s pure, just like I am. I died for him on the cross. And yes, he had some troubles and some issues, but I covered his sin. It’s been taken care of. Though his sin was scarlet, it’s now as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Your standing is secure.

God’s Word says our progress is sure.

Who was the One Who called you in the first place? Who does the calling of unbelievers back to God? Christ, right? Christ is the One Who calls you and He is faithful (1 Thessalonians 5:24). He will do it. There are some who will say, “Well, God may not know what He got when He picked me. He might want to return me.” Let me tell you something: salvation does not come with a “gift receipt” so Jesus can turn you back in. Jesus knows what He got when He gave the gospel call for you to be saved—just as He did for every one of us.

He knows what He is doing. He’s in the process of saving sinners—even dirty, rotten, filthy ones like the ones I’m looking at right now. Just like me. So He’s not going to say, “You know what? Father, I got into a project that is a lot more than I thought. So I’m going to turn this Badal character in for another. I’m going to turn in my gift receipt and get someone else.” *“He who calls you is faithful.”*

Now, Paul could have stopped there, but he says our entire hope for salvation, sanctification and glorification is not founded on us. It’s founded on Christ. Does that mean we don’t build on that foundation? The Bible talks about that. We are to build on that foundation. We are living stones, being built up into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4–5). But we can know that if we have given our lives over to Jesus Christ—while the construction may be long, loud and probably messy—at some point, when we stand before God, He’s going to show, not an incomplete work, but a complete work before the Judge and Father in heaven.

So you don’t have to lose confidence. You don’t have to lose hope. Paul reiterates: God will complete his work. No qualification. No hesitation. No doubt of any kind. Just four simple words: He will do it. Not may do it. Not might do it. Not could do it. Not do it if He feels like it. Not even do it if we do our part. He will do it. What a declarative statement we are given here. We can have faith and hope that the One Who began the good work in us will see it to the day of completion (Philippians 1:6).

Praise God, right? Aren’t you glad you can have that confidence and assurance, that if you have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, you can stand before God? If today was the day of your judgment, you could stand before Him with calmness in your heart, because God has done His work.

God’s Word says our future is sealed.

When will all this happen? At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read over and over again that at the coming of the Lord we will experience one of two futures:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10, *“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”*
- 2 Thessalonians 1:9–10, *“The punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.”* In a couple weeks we’re going to talk about the judgment. You’re going to see in the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians things like wrath and inflicting vengeance and flaming fire.

Listen, at the coming of Christ—which could be today, it could be tomorrow, or it could be a hundred years from now—whenever that moment comes, there will be two responses. The believer will look and with great assurance in his heart will say, “Yes. Jesus has come.” But the unbeliever will experience great weeping and gnashing of teeth. God says there will be no confidence in that moment.

This begs the question which we’ve been asking over and over again in this series: are you ready for the coming of our Lord? If you’re not—I don’t say it; God’s Word says it—vengeance and judgments, punishment and eternal destruction are what you have

to look forward to. If you're a child of God, then confidence and joy and peace and love and mercy and salvation are what you have to look forward to. For those who have not bowed the knee to Christ, God's Word says today is the day of salvation. You too can have it as well.

If I stopped here, then every one of us would buy into the powerboat approach, but that's incomplete. God is doing an amazing work. He promises that this work will be done. But Paul doesn't stop there, although he could have stopped at the end of verse 24: *"He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."* Instead, he gives us three more verses and I want to close with this.

3. In order to get ready, we must engage with the practices that lead us to holiness.

Paul has already shared with us, in verses 16–22, the practices that lead us to holiness. He used what I like to call "bumper sticker theology." *"Rejoice always."* You could put that on a bumper sticker. *"Pray without ceasing."* That can go there too. *"Give thanks in all circumstances."* You can fit that on a bumper. *"Do not quench the Spirit,"* verse 19. Verse 20, *"Do not despise prophecies."* Verse 21, *"Test everything; hold fast to what is good."* Verse 22, *"Abstain from every form of evil."*

Bumper sticker theology. It's good. It works. These are all things we need to be doing. These are all things that draw us closer to God. As God's doing His work, we play a part. Remember, it's a sailboat. Not a powerboat. Not a rowboat. It's us working together with God, in unison with God—God doing the part only He can do; you and I doing the part He has called us to do. So God tells us, "You've got some work to do." Holiness is a task. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). We're to do our part.

Holiness is done best while in community.

Paul tells us how to accomplish this. Verse 25, *"Brothers, pray for us."* Verse 26, *"Greet all brothers with a holy kiss."* Let's stop there. Verse 27, *"Have this letter read to all the brothers."* Three times in three verses we see the word "Brothers." In fact, 19 times in this entire letter and another eight times in the next letter, we see the word "Brothers." "Brothers" signifies that the Christian life in Thessalonica was an endeavor done in community, not in isolation.

I'm going to say something that might cause some people to think. I believe it is far easier to find holiness in Christ when you're with a group of Christians than it is to find it in isolation. Here's how I know: I've done a study. I sin more when I'm apart from you than when I'm with you. Did you know that? I'm terrible by myself. I need people in my life. I need them to keep me from sinning. If I stay away long enough and the devil starts working in my life, then I don't know what I'll do or where I'll go. I recognize that the heart is deceitfully sick. I need people to point that out in my life, people who tell me, "Hey Tim, you're moving away a little bit. Come on back. We love you. Come back to what the Lord is saying." We need people to help us.

So when we ask you to be part of things—and I keep going back to this—we're not asking you to be part of programs. This is not a community center. The elders believe the reason you need to stay involved is that it's the greatest protection for your holiness. So we want to get you around other Christians to study God's Word together, to talk about the things of the Lord, to make sure that God has a part in whatever we're doing. Even if we're shooting baskets in the gym or getting together with a group of guys on a Saturday, we want to be together because we believe holiness is best done in community.

Notice a few things about holiness. First, it's spiritual. So pray for your brothers. We aren't enjoying the same hobby; rather, we're soldiers in the same battle. So we pray for one another's protection. Holiness starts in community so that when we're not in community, our prayers will go with each other. "Lord, I pray for my friends out in the workplace this week, that they will work with an ethic that comes from You, that they'll make wise decisions, that they won't compromise their Christianity for the sake of a sale." I pray for my brothers and sisters in that way. They're soldiers in the battle.

Second, this holiness is inclusive. Paul says *"Greet all the brothers."* Not some of the brothers—which also includes sisters—we're to greet all of them. This pursuit of holiness isn't just for the white people, and we push the black people away. It's not for the black people but not for the Hispanics. It's not for the Americans but not the Africans or the Asians. It is for all people. It isn't for those who are fully put together; it's for those who are struggling, who are fighting through sin. It's not just for the mature; it's for the immature. It's not just for the rich, but for the poor. It is for all people, and we extend that love and kindness to all.

Finally, the holiness found in community will be intimate. Paul says to give each other kisses. I know—right away you think, "That's cultural. We don't do that." As a pastor, let me help you out with something. It is very, very dangerous to go to the

Scriptures and say, “Ah, this part is cultural.” We don’t like it when other people take parts of the Scripture and say, “Well, that was in the first century, but that’s certainly not true for today,” right? We have that argument going on all over our world today. So we need to understand when it says to give each other kisses, it means our relationships should be intimate. They should be close. Some of us can’t even see ourselves putting out a hand to one another, let alone giving a kiss to another. A holy kiss cannot be done at arm’s length. It gets up close and personal. I’m Middle Eastern. I’ve had a whole lot of people kiss me. It’s up close and personal. Man, if you’re a germophobe, you’re in trouble if you’re in the Assyrian culture. There are no germs. We’re just one Petri dish, right? It’s men, women, people you’ve met, people you haven’t—they’re kissing one side, the other side, multiple times. Man, it’s intimate. It’s up close and personal.

What Paul is saying is that our fellowship needs to be that way as well. So the way we display our fellowship “through a holy kiss” means we should be in one another’s lives. People should know us. They shouldn’t just know our name—they should know who we are, what we do, what we’re about, where we live, what concerns us, what brings us joy. It’s done best in community.

Holiness is founded on a certain curriculum.

Verse 27 says, *“I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.”* Paul wants this letter read to all, because he knew that holiness would never be found apart from the Word of God. We need someone to tell us we aren’t holy. We need someone to tell us, “But we can be holy.” Someone needs to tell us that we can tap into Jesus Christ, Who’s the One Who can make us holy, Who points to the activities that allow that holiness to take hold.

That curriculum is being held in your hand: the Word of God. It’s why every week we pick up this Book and read it and sit under its teaching. We know we can’t find holiness without it. We base our holiness on this Letter that was read 2,000 years ago and changed lives then. It’s the same Letter that’s changing lives today.

Holiness is only possible through Christ.

But right when we think we can figure it out (“If I just do what this Book says and hang out with the right kind of people, well, then I’ll be holy.”), verse 28 reminds us again that it’s only possible through Christ: *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”*

What a great word for a new week, right? We’ve got another Monday coming and it’s going to be a hard one. What do we need tomorrow morning? Grace. What do you need in your marriage tomorrow morning? Grace. What do you need with your kids tomorrow morning? Lots of grace. When you go to work tomorrow morning, what are you going to need? Grace. When that temptation comes your way tomorrow morning, what are you going to be looking for? Grace. When you fail and fall flat on your face, what are you looking for? Grace. When you don’t think you’re ready, what do you need? Grace.

And that grace comes through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. We can be holy, because our God in heaven is holy and because He sent His Son to die to make us His righteousness. God has played His part—are you playing yours? Are the things in your life ready for the winds of God’s holiness to take you from your salvation to that great and glorious glorification? There’s work for us to do, so let’s work to that end, in Christ’s name.