



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Are You Ready or Not?

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 18
Tim Badal | May 15, 2016 | 2 Thessalonians 3:13–18



I want to close out this series by addressing the issues that Paul talks about in these closing verses, but also to do some level of review as well to remind us of where we have been and what it truly means to be a ready follower of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at the 2 Thessalonians 3:13–18 together. Here's what it says:

¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

I want to ask a question: are you ready or not? As children, we used to spend a lot of time outside playing games. One of the games we'd play as small children was Hide-and-Seek. You know the game. You'd get a group of kids together, and one person would be "It". That person would find a place (usually a tree or post), put themselves next to it, close their eyes, and begin the countdown. As they were counting, everyone else would go running to find a hiding place where no one would be able to find them, because the last thing you wanted was to be caught by the person who was It. You knew the game was starting as the countdown finished, and the individual would say, "Ready or not, here I come!" You've played the game.

I learned early on that this game was really about getting away from me. Any time I was It, I could never find anyone. They had left the area code. I learned through counseling that that happens sometimes. My personality was an acquired taste. But as the game went on, the job of the other kids was to be prepared. In a short period of time, they had to make decisions: "Where am I going to hide?" and "How am I going to make sure the person who's 'It' can't find me?" It's child's play—kid's fun.

If we apply this idea to the spiritual realm—to our Christian lives—it becomes a profound thought. At the end of His ministry, Jesus told us, "I'm coming back." Every Christian who holds to Scriptural truths believes that He will come back one day, and that in His Second Coming, He will separate those who have been found righteous in His eyes and those who are unrighteous—those who've been obedient to His Word, and those who've been disobedient. A countdown is underway and we don't know when it will end. Only the Father in Heaven is aware of it. But, at some point, Jesus is going to say, "Ready or not, here I come."

If you think, "I still have a little time to find a place to be ready," we are told in 2 Thessalonians that there will not be an opportunity to change course in that moment. When Jesus comes, you will either be magnified and brought to glory, or you will be condemned to everlasting ruin.

In all these weeks we've spent studying this letter, the constant theme has been readiness. As we close this letter, we have to ask, "Are you ready for the coming of the Lord? Are you living in such a way that shows you to be ready for whatever God may bring your way?" To answer that question, we need to ask three questions.

What am I Holding Onto?

The first part of this passage is hard. It seemingly goes against what we know about loving Christianity. Paul's going to tell us that loving Christianity does the hard things. Notice what he says: *"As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good."* We addressed this last week—the importance of not being lazy in serving, loving and caring for people as we minister to one another in faith.

But notice: Paul goes on to say, *"If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person..."* Let's stop there for a moment. Within this vibrant, growing church, Paul seems to identify people who find themselves disobeying the Word of the Lord—the message of the apostles. Turn back to 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Paul says this:

¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

By commanding people to hold onto the truth that he's teaching, and then saying, "Be careful of those who disobey the truth," Paul warns that you can be a person within a God-centered, Bible-believing church—you can be a part of all the activities—yet find yourself out of step with God and His program for you. Paul was speaking to people in the Thessalonian church who, in essence, were hanging around the church, but weren't hanging around Jesus—who enjoyed the activity, but weren't being changed by the gospel that was preached to them. Paul says, "Listen, you have to take note of such people."

Paul says that one of the key criteria for a follower of Jesus Christ is that we hold onto the traditions we have been taught. When we spoke of this a couple weeks ago, we were reminded that the phrase "hold onto" was a nautical term. It speaks of the choppy seas that a sailor might endure during a storm. The sailor's job was to find something on the deck to hold onto so that he wouldn't be tossed to and fro as the waves hit the ship. He would find something secure and immovable—something that he could have full confidence in and could trust wasn't going to move.

Paul says, "Christ-followers have to hold onto the truth of Scripture." That's one of the key characteristics we have. In good times and bad, in sunny days and storms, are we holding onto the Scriptures as our life vest that keeps us afloat? Notice what he asks: "Are you holding to the truth?" I can't answer that question for you, and you can't answer it for me. It's a reflective question we have to ask of ourselves: "As one who professes with my mouth that Christ is all that He is and the Scriptures are all that I believe them to be, how am I living that out? Is that true in my daily walk?"

Seemingly, there were people who professed Christ and were involved in the church who had no intention of following the commands or traditions that Paul was teaching. They were unwilling to hold onto the truth they had been taught.

How do we know if the Word of God really is something that we hold onto, or if it's simply a tradition that we believe but don't live out? I want you to see three things about what the Word of God does that will help you know if you are holding true to the traditions you were taught.

Number one: The Word of God will cause your faith to be stretched. Paul says this in verse three: *"We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly..."* The idea of growing abundantly is (literally) "super-growing" in the original Greek. It speaks of an abnormal rate of growth—a rate of growth that people will notice.

We are always surprised by the rate of growth of our children, for example. I'm watching my three boys grow, and it's crazy—especially our oldest son. He's growing all the time. He's eating all the time as well, but he's growing like a beanstalk. It's also amazing as we look at the fields around us. We used to say, "A good crop is knee-high by the Fourth of July." Because of technology and the way things are going, a couple of years ago it was eye-high. We have ways of measuring growth. We have ways of knowing, "Is this growing at the rate that it should?"

The Thessalonians, Paul says, are growing abundantly beyond the realm of what can be explained. These are young believers. They've turned away from their idols, selfishness and sin. They've given themselves to the Savior, Jesus Christ, and are growing at an abnormal rate of speed. People were amazed as they observed this church body.

If you are one who holds to the Word, then you should see faith grow in your life. Well, how do you know if your faith is growing? How can we really tell? How do you measure faith? It's not like you can get on a scale and say, "Oh, I gained four pounds of faith this week!" It doesn't happen that way. So how do we know?

There are four questions we have to ask with regard to our faith.

First, “Am I growing in my relationship with Christ and His church? Am I closer to Jesus today than I was six months ago?” We rate our relationship with other individuals this way. I can assure you that I know my wife Amanda and have a greater love and deeper interaction with her now than I did five, ten or eighteen years ago. We’re in an ongoing relationship. We live and experience life together. We’re being drawn closer together as we live life hand-in-hand.

Similarly, are we in a deeper relationship with Christ now than we were at a previous time? Many of us have allowed our faith to be stunted. We look back to some point early in life when we were really on fire—maybe it was a youth group experience, serving the church as a young single, early in your marriage or when your kids were young. You look back and think, “That’s when I was on fire for the Lord.” Paul is saying that the Thessalonians didn’t look back to when they were on fire for the Lord. They looked at the present. Their faith was growing.

Secondly, “Am I utilizing the God-given gifts I’ve been given?” Paul says that these people are out serving and using their gifts. If you have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, you will become like Christ in service. If your faith is being stretched, it will stretch you into service opportunities that you never thought were possible. Are you seeing God burden you to be part of serving Him in a way that might be totally out of your comfort zone?

As a church, we are always asking that question as ministry opportunities come up. Right now we’re looking for some help in the moms’ ministry—a ministry that has produced great fruit in bringing young moms and their families to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In a church our size, we’d imagine that someone would have a burden to serve in this way—someone who would say, “Because I’m so in love with Jesus, so in love with seeing the gospel reach families, I’m willing to stretch. I’m willing to use these feeble gifts and abilities to serve God.”

Are you serving God in a way that’s growing, or are you in some level of spiritual retirement? “I did my service 20 years ago. Let the young people do that. I no longer need to.” That response was absent from the Thessalonian church.

Third, “Is my life characterized by generosity?” As these people came to know Jesus, and lived lives that were set apart by Him, they were reminded of the truth of John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave...”* As we develop into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, we will be burdened with the job of giving—not only of our money, but of our time, talents, treasure and testimonies. Every part of us will be a generous person. We will seek to honor God through generosity in all that we say or do.

Fourth, “Do I have a God-centered vision? Do I see everything that I say and do through the filter of ‘God, my life is in Your hands? I place everything that I have and do on Your throne. I’m not going to conform myself to this world. I’m going to allow Your Word, grace and gospel to transform me, that I will become every day and in every way a deeper and more devoted follower of Jesus Christ. It’s all about you, God. It’s less about me? How I spend my money and invest my time—how I am at work, school and home—how I go through the daily activities of life—all of it has to funnel through ‘What would Jesus have of me?’, with the realization that I would fail each and every day without the Spirit’s help. Do I have that kind of vision?” Paul says their faith was being stretched. Is yours? Is your faith ready for God?

Number two: The Word of God will cause your love to spread. Notice 2 Thessalonians 1:3: *“...the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.”* The word “increasing” is used of a swollen creek that is overflowing its banks. We’ve seen this due to the rain we had in this last week. Our creeks and rivers are overflowing their banks. We’re seeing puddles and lakes in our fields. When you woke up the other day and saw all this standing water, there were some realizations.

- Number one: it rained a lot the night before. Where we see standing water—when we see a creek that was only four feet deep, and is now twelve feet deep—we recognize that there’s been a lot of rain.
- Number two: the rain has poured so much water into the river or creek that it’s now overflowed its banks.

Paul says that the love we have as Christians should be overflowing. When someone sees how we love, the response should be, “They’re getting that love from somewhere else. There is not a well of love that makes up its own love as it goes. Just like the creeks, they take what they’ve been given. His is an extraordinary kind of love. That love came from somewhere, because nobody has that kind of love in their reservoir. Someone has filled that love to capacity.” And our response needs to be, “I love because God first loved me (1 John 4:19). I love because Jesus Christ showed me what it is to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). I love because God is love (1 John 4:8) and He has taught me that the greatest of all commandments is to love (Matthew 22:36-40).”

But how do we know if our love is being spread this way? Notice, first of all, that the width of it will grow. As we look at overflowing creeks, we see that they no longer fall into their normal channel. They’ve spread out. As we drive to a church, we

see an example of this. We go by a cow pasture with a winding creek running through it. Every time it floods, half the herd is on one side of the creek and half on the other side. Usually, they're able to walk across the water without any trouble. But now they can't because the creek is wider and deeper so they're unable to pass through as they did before.

Our love should spread as well. While we start with a little creek of love, the channel should get wider and wider as God pours His love into our lives. What does that look like? The Thessalonians' love was touching people it had never touched before. To be ready for Jesus Christ's return is to be a person whose love touches people whom it didn't a year ago. It stretches to people you didn't think were all that loveable before—that person at work, that neighbor, or that enemy whom you have nothing but evil thoughts against. As God works in your life—as you're reading the Scripture and being challenged by His Word—you're watching your little creek of love become more like a river. Because of that, you are touching more lives.

Notice also that the way we recognize our love is by its depth. The creek that I'm talking about didn't just grow wider; it grew deeper. Our depth of love will not be characterized by a superficial depth, but by a profound love that goes deeper than a cordial conversation with someone and seeks to go the extra mile, because that's what Jesus did. He put Himself on the cross. He didn't just come and visit us for a little while. His love was deep and profound. He walked on this earth. He talked with us. He endured profound kinds of sorrow and pain so that He could go to a cross and do the most loving thing anybody could do. He laid down His life for His friends. Is your love growing deeper? Is it expansive?

Paul says that to be ready, your faith must be stretched, your love must be spread and your hope must be sure. He says in 1 Thessalonians 1 that these people had a steadfastness of hope. The question here is, "How well do I follow God when life gets tough?" The Thessalonians followed God amidst afflictions and persecutions.

When life gets tough, you have two options. Remember the story of Job. He was afflicted with all kinds of sorrows, trials and pain. He lost much of his family and wealth, his health failed him, and his wife (in the moment of calamity) came to him and suggested one response for when bad things happen: "Curse God and die, Job. Get angry at God; be done with it all." Of course, Job (being the wise man he was) turned away from his wife's foolishness. He said something that we sing about in our songs: "Though he gives and takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

The one way that we'll know if we're ready or not is the hope that we have. Are we turning away from God in trials and tribulations? Is there a perseverance in the thought that God is in control and loves us? Though it may be difficult at the time, God will use all these hard things to further His Kingdom, to bring character and perseverance into our lives and to mature us to become more like Him. How do you view the trials and tribulations that you face? Is your hope sure? What are you holding onto today?

Who am I Hanging Out With?

Paul says that if you're going to be ready, you've got to hang around with the right people. In 1 Corinthians 15:33, Paul quotes an old proverb, "Bad company corrupts good character" (NIV). Here in 2 Thessalonians, Paul says, "We've told you that you have an option: you can hold onto yourself or onto God's Word. You can hold onto the things of this world or onto Christ. The decisions you make are going to be based on who you're hanging out with." Let's pick our friends wisely.

What Paul isn't saying is not to hang out with people in the world. He's addressing those inside the church. Notice what he says:

¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Our readiness will be strengthened or hindered by the company we keep. We've got to determine whether or not the people we hang out with are obedient to the Word, or lax in their walk with God. It seems that the Christians in Thessalonica were being dragged down by people who hung around the church, but who had no intention of following Christ. So Paul gives three words of instruction:

We are to acknowledge the character and conduct of others. When was the last time you seriously looked at the people you hang out with? Instead of just saying, "Well, they're funny, or popular, or they're my kind of people, or they like the same things I do," when was the last time you asked, "Are they people of solid Christian character and conduct? Who are they, really? Are they devoted to the Person and work of Jesus Christ in their lives? Are they walking with the Lord in a way that helps me and motivates me to be a stronger believer? Does their character scream, 'I'm in love with Jesus!?' Or are they people who say, 'I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, but don't ask me how I live it out. Don't ask me how I show God that. Just believe my message'?"

Paul says to “...take note of that person...” We need to take time, look at who we’re hanging out with, and ask, “Are these people helping my relationship with Christ or not?” If they’re helping the relationship, then enjoy the friendship and fellowship. But if they’re lacking in that way, hindering your walk with Christ, Paul says, “Avoid their company.”

Notice what else he says: “...take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him...” “Wait a minute, Paul. I thought we were all to get together and have group hugs. I thought we were all supposed to sing “Kumbaya” around a fire. I thought the church accepted everybody in every way.” The church is to accept people who say they’re looking for a relationship with Jesus Christ, but we need to be careful, recognizing that there are people who say they have a relationship with Jesus Christ but whose lives say something totally different.

Remember, Jesus says in Matthew 7:21–23, “On the day when I come, many will say, ‘Lord, Lord. Did I not do this? Did I not do that? Did I not do all these miraculous things?’” But Jesus will say, “Depart from Me. I never knew you.” The scariest thing to me as a pastor is that there are people within this church today who will get this response from Jesus on the Day of Judgment. They’ll say, “But Lord, I sat at Village Bible Church. I listened to Pastor Tim preach. I gave money to Village Bible Church. I even served—kind of begrudgingly, but I did it. I did all of these things.” And Jesus will say, “But I never knew you. We were never in relationship together.”

Paul says, “A person who professes Christ, and then lives contrary to that profession, is one who should be set aside and avoided.” Of course, this conjures up what we’re told in Matthew 18—something we as a church practice that I know scares people: church discipline. There are times when someone who professes to be a follower of Jesus Christ has a life that is characterized by selfishness and sin. While the process of church discipline is gracious and sometimes long, there are moments when the church must say, “We can’t hang out with you anymore. You’re lying to us, to God and to the world, because you’re living as if you can profess Jesus and live any way you want.” Paul says, “Avoid them. Stay away from them.”

Number three: admonish them as a Christian. What does that mean? He says, “They’re not an enemy. Don’t treat them like one. Treat them as a brother. Recognize that they’re wayward. Recognize that they abandoned the ranks.” We learned last week that walking in idleness—in discord with the tradition that we were taught—was the idea of a soldier breaking rank from a formation. The job of the Christian in the church, and of the church itself, is to announce to that person (like a drill sergeant), “Get back in line! Get back in formation!” If someone is not walking in the traditions of the Lord, our job should be to remind them, over and over again, to come back to where they once were—to get back into the formation that God has called them to be part of in the church.

We acknowledge their conduct and avoid their company. We admonish them through love and grace, recognizing that we ourselves could break rank any time as well—that we are as prone to that kind of leaving as they are. Our job is to lovingly, yet loudly, speak into their lives to return and repent, so that they might be ready for the coming of the Lord.

This begs the question: what should I be looking for in Christian friendship? While the text doesn’t address it, I want to give you three things that you should be looking for in Christian fellowship. Number one: Christian fellowship should always be pointing you in the right direction. Does your interaction with fellow believers point you to a greater or lesser obedience to God? Are those interactions challenging you in the spiritual areas of your life? Do those conversations that you have speak to you about your temptations and proclivity to sin, and address the importance of not falling into Satan’s schemes? Do your friends know your failings and struggles? Are they willing to protect you from all that the devil throws your way? When you are with them, do you feel like you’re drawing closer to Jesus Christ, or as if you’re having a conversation that has nothing to do with Him?

Sadly, for many of us, if an outsider were to see our interactions with fellow believers, they would just see an interaction between two people—whether they’re believers or not doesn’t matter. Our conversation is never about Christ, our sins or how we can bring honor and glory to God. It’s about the weather, sports, work or the kids. Christ is never the subject. Christian fellowship is not just friendship. It’s a bond where brothers and sisters in Christ, who are from far different places of the world, have been brought together under the banner of Jesus Christ, saved by the same blood, empowered by the same Spirit. It is unthinkable that two Christians would ever get together, spend any amount of time together, yet the subject of Jesus never come up. We need people who will point us in the right direction.

Number two: as Paul shows us, we need people who will pray for us often. Throughout this letter, Paul has told us over and over again how he prayed for these people. He says to the people, “Pray for us.” Christians who hang out with one another should be people who are praying for one another. This brings up another question: when was the last time you spent a concerted amount of time and energy praying for the people around you? Do you know if people are praying for you? Have you opened up your life enough that people can know what you’re struggling with and what’s concerning you, so they can lift you up in

prayer? That's going to involve some transparency. The more isolated our culture becomes, the more we become a people who don't pray for one another—and whatever our prayers are, they're likely superficial. If we let them know what they should be praying for, they may judge us.

I'm blessed to know that there are friends in my life who know the very heartbeat of my soul—my struggles and failings, and my proclivity to all manner of sin—who are willing to speak into my life on behalf of me to my God in Heaven and lift me up in prayer. I cannot tell you how many times I have sensed their prayers in my life. It compels me, then, in turn, to pray for them, and to know them better. It motivates me to tell them that I'm praying for them and lifting them up—that I'm thinking of them often and bringing them before the Lord. Are your friends praying for you often?

Number three: are they protecting you from laziness? Paul says the reason we have to be careful of this is that laziness is contagious. This is where it gets tricky. Friends need to be able to help us remember the commitments we've made and what the Word of God has taught. But that gets hard every once in a while. When we're lax, the last thing we want someone doing is pointing us to where we are failing, where we're missing the mark. Paul says that when there is idleness, we need to call it out. When someone is lax in their spiritual life—whether it's in their morals, their decision making or in turning away from the church altogether—someone needs to come to them and say, "Hey, you're a follower of Jesus Christ. You have professed a deep and profound relationship with Him. Now you've given it all up. What's going on?"

One of the commitments of our membership here at Village Bible Church is to speak the truth with grace and love into each other's lives, even at times when we may not want to hear it. What that means is if you observe that my message is not being lived out in any way, I welcome and expect that other brothers and sisters in Christ are going to come and say, "Hey, Tim, I'm seeing and hearing some things that seem unbecoming and go against what you yourself have professed. Let's talk about them."

You say, "Well, where's that in Scripture?" Paul addresses that in 1 Thessalonians 5:14: "*And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak...*" There are three things here: "Admonish" is what parents do to teenage kids, right? It's a big word for "give them a good talking to." We're to admonish those who are being lazy: "You're missing it! You know what the Scripture says. Now start living that way!"

But there are other people Paul mentions who are faint-hearted. They're scared. We need to encourage them: "Hey, I know life is difficult. I know you're dealing with some hard things. But be encouraged: God loves you. He'll never leave you or forsake you."

Then there are those who are weak. They don't need to be yelled at. What they need is help. They need someone to come alongside them, walk with them, put their arm around them, helping them as they limp through life.

Notice what God's Word says: we are to be patient with them all. Village Bible Church is a church that believes in accountability which means that, as a church, we believe community Christianity is better than Christianity done by itself. I can deceive myself into thinking that I'm doing a really good job—that I'm accomplishing God's will in my life. But I recognize that there are places in my life that I can't see. I need someone to help me see them.

As you know, I shave my head. But I never shave my head when I'm by myself at the house. You want to know why? There's a lot of acreage back here. I'm prone to miss places on my head. The worst thing that could happen to me is walking out with a landing strip going on back there. I can do my best to get it all, but when I shave my head I do not leave the house without doing what we call the head check. I'll tell one of the boys, "Kid, you've got to be honest. This is not the time to get your Dad, alright? Come on, I've got a reputation I've got to uphold here." I will literally take my head, bring it down, and say, "What are you seeing? Am I missing something?" I don't mean this just to be funny. This is applicable to our lives.

That's what we, as Christians, have to do—to be willing to (in essence) bend down a little bit and say, "Hey, can you look at this area of my life? Am I missing it? Did I get all of it? I don't want to bring reproach to the name of Christ—to make Christ look like a fool because there are problems that I'm missing in my life. I am willing to acknowledge that you might see things better than I do." That takes humility. It will only work if you're humble enough to say, "You know what? You've got a better vantage point into my life than I do."

Let me tell you: that goes against everything that we know in American culture. "I am the smartest person in the room," our culture says. "I know more than you do. I don't have to listen to you. I can do it all by myself." Christianity says, "You can't do it by yourself. You need others in your life who will graciously look at your life." Now here's what I don't want my family to do: "Hey, am I missing anything?" And Amanda says, "You moron! How could you miss that spot on your head? How could you not

feel that? Are you brain dead or something? Do you want to go around looking like a fool? How could you do that?" I don't want that. That'd be the last time I'd ever ask Amanda to check if I missed a spot on my head. No, Amanda graciously says, "Yeah, you missed a spot right here. Not there. No, not there. There. Let's get it cleaned up. Let's take care of it."

As Christians, we can't go around mocking and being angry with people. We help them by pointing out the areas they've missed, so they can be confident that they're walking for the Lord. Accountability is not a bad word. It is a word that enables us to help one another live like Christ.

Who are you hanging out with? Who are you allowing to speak into your life? Paul says that if we hang around with people who are lazy in their walk with Jesus Christ, we will become lazy as well. We've got to find people who are going to encourage our relationship with Christ and even challenge us at times when it makes us feel uneasy.

What am I Hoping For?

What are you hanging onto? Who are you hanging out with? Finally, what are you hoping for? Paul closes this letter by reminding us that just as the Thessalonians needed the peace of God, so do we. They were living during times of affliction and persecution. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul says, *"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless..."* The peace of God is going to change you.

Now, in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, he says, *"...may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way."* "But listen, Paul," the Thessalonians say, "don't you know that we're struggling with affliction and persecution?" These people were losing their jobs and homes. They were being kicked out of their family gatherings because of their walk with Jesus Christ. Soon they would be jailed and thrown among the lions. "Don't you know, Paul, that we're living during turbulent times? How in the world can you say that the God of the universe will give us peace—and not just some peace, but peace in all times and every way? How can that happen?"

Well, Paul told the people of two places where our peace is not found. It's not found in life's circumstances. Some of you are thinking, "I'd have peace if my marriage was stronger. I'd have peace if there was money in the checking account. I'd have peace if I knew my job was secure. I'd have peace if my kids would listen to me. I'd have peace if everything was going great." Paul never says that. In fact, the Bible never says that. You will never find peace because life's circumstances are going well. Look at Hollywood. Folks in Hollywood are looking for all the bells and whistles. They've got everything going for them. What do we see? Hollywood is filled with the saddest people we know. There are all kinds of drugs and efforts to pursue pleasures, just to try to find peace.

I was reading an article about the late musician Prince. He was an incredible artist, a gifted guy. He played dozens of different instruments and sold millions of records. The guy had fame fortune, and everything you could ever want. They said he was despondent in the last decade of his life, dealing with horrific depression. Don't tell me that you're going to find peace when everything is good. Peace is not found in life's circumstances.

Notice as well that peace is not found in the culture. This is probably a little more apropos for most of the church. Some of us are saying right now, "I would be a lot more at peace if our country would return to God. I'd be back at peace if our schools would have prayer. I'd get back to peace if I knew God was winning this culture war. I'd be at peace if we elected the right man or woman. I'd be at peace if we had the right judges. I'd be at peace if politics were going the way I'd hope." We build this idea of having peace as a Christian by winning the culture wars. Never do we see a victory in the culture wars ever bring about spiritual change in the life of the Christian.

So what brings us peace and hope? What can we hold onto? What can we hope for? Paul says that our hope is not based on life's circumstances or the culture, but on the coming of Jesus Christ. We don't know if Christ's coming will be today or tomorrow. We don't know if it will be in our lifetime or the next. But here's what we can hope for, no matter the timing of Christ's coming. First of all, Christ's coming reminds us that God's plan is not complete. The rest of the story is still to be written. We're in the middle of this, not the end. God has not left us and said, "You know what? I'm done. I'm leaving the building." He's got a plan. He's got a purpose to bring all things together.

The second thing that Christ's coming reminds us of is that He is still intimately and actively involved in our lives. If He says, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I'm going to prepare a place for you, then I will come back and bring you where I am, so we'll be together forever" (John 14:1-3), then it tells us that Jesus is fully aware of our lot in life. He's saying, "Don't lose hope. I'm coming back. When I come, I will resolve every wrong. I will right everything that has

been wrong or missing in the lives of My people.” The coming of Jesus Christ is a moment in time that we can look forward to, recognizing that the best is yet to come.

Notice the conquering of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2 that a man of lawlessness will be revealed in the last days. He’ll do a lot of destroying. He’ll do a lot of things filled with hate. People will worship him as if he’s God. Yet, at the moment when things are darkest, something will take place. In 2:8, we’re reminded that on the day of the Lord’s return, *“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth...”* We need to recognize that evil will be destroyed once and for all at the coming of Christ. All of our struggles and affliction—all of the things that we deal with in a fallen world—will once and for all be leveled at His coming. Whether it’s a bad medical report, a bad financial report, a bad spiritual report—or whether we look at culture and see our country falling apart at the seams spiritually—we can have confidence that there’s a day coming when Jesus Christ will take care of everything.

So what do we do between now and His return? How do we remain in a state of readiness? Paul finishes this letter with 2 Thessalonians 3:18: *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”* What do you need to be a follower of Jesus Christ? You need grace. What do you need when you go to the workplace tomorrow? Grace. What do you need in your marriage? Grace. What do you need when you’re dealing with your kids? Lots of grace. What do you need when trouble comes? Grace. What do you need when you find yourself at the top of the mountain? Grace. What is grace? God’s unmerited favor and love for His people. Like those overflowing creeks and rivers, we need to open ourselves up to the grace of God. If we’re not ready in certain areas, then we need to ask God for forgiveness. The Bible says that when we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9), so that we may experience His love and mercy in their fullest, and in doing so find ourselves ready.

Are you ready for His coming? He’s coming. What are you holding onto? Who are you hanging out with? Where is your hope? Hopefully you can answer these questions personally and reflectively today, and make the needed changes that God calls you to through His Word.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.net).