

# Guest Preacher - Rev. Calum M Smith

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Preacher: Rev. Calum Murdo Smith

[ 0 : 00 ] We can turn back to our reading in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5. We're going to look at the end of the chapter, verse 23, down to the end.

1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 23. 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, he who calls you is faithful.

He will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Well, as we look at the end of this letter, in many ways it's Paul signing off this letter saying his goodbye for now, in the hope of seeing these people again another time.

Goodbyes can be very hard. When you're leaving loved ones behind, it's often very difficult to say goodbye and to say goodbye without tears.

[ 1 : 20 ] I've experienced it, and I'm sure many of you have experienced it in different ways over your lives, where you've had to say goodbye in different situations. I remember going away to sea.

Every time felt like just being torn away in many ways and having to say goodbye, and many often in tears have experienced it in leaving home or moving from one place to another, just thinking about it.

It was 18 years ago this month that we left this congregation as a family and said our goodbyes and went away to Edinburgh to begin studying there.

And so, goodbyes can be difficult. They can be many tears, very emotional. And as you look at these closing verses of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul's closing remarks, it's a hard goodbye.

But yet, there's something in it that reminds us of when we are saying goodbye to those we love, when it's in the Lord that is such a difference.

[ 2 : 30 ] That we are not just saying goodbye and we'll never see you again, we can't do anything for you, but that there is a unity and a oneness under the gospel and in Christ.

And that's what Paul has as he's writing to the church here at Thessalonica. He has this great confidence in the Lord. You see just how that is shown when we read at the beginning of this chapter.

He says that you are children of the light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. He's talking about the hope that they have in Jesus Christ, that confidence that he has that they are the Lord's people.

And so as he comes to these closing remarks in verse 23 to the end, it is full of confidence of where they are and whose they are.

He hadn't been with them long. He hadn't been in Thessalonica long. You read of it in chapter 2, verse 17. It says there that as they were there, since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we have endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.

[ 3 : 49 ] Isn't that beautiful the way he writes that? We were torn away from you for a short time in person, but not in heart. So even though there was a distance between them physically, there was still a closeness between them in the Lord.

And that's the way it so often is in the Christian family. Brothers and sisters in the Lord who, although they may be apart in many different ways, goodbyes are often hard, that there is still this togetherness in the Lord.

And what Paul was seeing and hearing of was that the gospel was working powerfully in their midst, even when he had been torn away from them. But he had a concern for them.

And in this concern, he sent young Timothy back to them to see how things were going. And he's heard back from Timothy about the encouraging report of their faith.

And that's what this letter is all about, how encouraged he's been and how he's given instruction to them to keep going and to always have their eyes fixed on Jesus.

[ 4 : 59 ] And as you come to the close of the letter, although there's emotion in it, there's a real sense of encouragement too. There's a security in these words, in the Lord.

And that's what counts. When we leave people behind, or when we leave people who are going our way, we often give parting gifts.

And Paul is here reminding them of the gift that they had in parting. It was that knowledge of Jesus Christ, of sharing in the gospel together.

And there's three things that we see outlined in these verses. This verse 23 to the end, that he is reminding them that they have, and encouraging them to put to use, and to keep putting into use.

And the first thing is godliness. That they have godliness, and that they are to keep going in this godliness. The second thing is they have gifts, and that they are to keep using these gifts.

[ 6 : 03 ] And then thirdly, as we see here, they have grace. The grace that keeps them. So first he is saying, you have godliness.

And this is at the heart of the Christian faith. To be a godly people. To be a holy people. A people set apart for God.

And you see that in verse 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.

They have godliness. How well do you know God? What is your knowledge of God?

God. It's not finished. We hope it's always increasing, and that there's a desire for more of this knowledge of God. And that's what Paul is outlining to the church here at Thessalonica, and to ourselves this evening.

[ 7 : 09 ] Because in many ways this is his prayer for the people, not just them, but for all of the Lord's people. May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.

May you keep going on in the strength and knowledge and understanding of the Lord. So that you are always growing in this godliness.

That's what every believer should long for. To be growing in godliness. Paul here in this letter has written to remind them of what they are to believe, of how they are to live.

There's much practical writing here. He has instructions for them about life, living life. And also, as you see towards the end, about the coming of the Lord, the day of the Lord's second coming, when he's going to come in judgment.

He's given them all that they need to live. And he's saying to them, Don't forget these teachings. Don't forget all the instruction I've given you. It's not that you know it all now, but you are to keep going in this way of living for the Lord.

[ 8 : 25 ] And the God of peace himself will sanctify you completely. In this prayer that he has for them, it contains both a request and a reminder to them.

The request is that they will know him more. That they will know him more. Do you know that it is only God that can give you peace?

Do you know that this God is the one, the one who created the heavens and the earth and all that we see around us, and that it is this God that has an interest in you, that he has this desire in you, that you will know him more, that you will experience him in great and powerful ways, that as you open up his word, as you look into his word, your heart will be filled to bursting with that burning sensation of being with the Lord through his word.

Like the two on the road to Emmaus, did not our hearts burn within us as he opened up his word to us? That is his desire for us.

And that is the request that Paul has here for the people, that they would find this peace. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you, that you would find this peace in him, and this ongoing peace.

[ 10 : 01 ] We are by nature a restless people. We are a people because of the sin that is in us, because of the way we are made, because of our desire to go and do our own thing, that we are always restless.

And we see it all around us. The people in Thessalonians have experienced both sides of the coin. They've been restless without God, but now they've come to see and know the peace of God, and Paul just wants them to continue this more and more.

Because we become so easily restless again and again. When we think we need to be doing one thing or another, we're a restless people by nature.

And we see it all around us. People are chasing after so many things in this world because there's a restlessness in their heart. Whether it's a new workplace, a new experience, a new car, a new home, whatever it is, there's so much restlessness.

But what is desired here is that they may know the peace of God, the peace that sanctifies, the peace that keeps, and the peace that will help them go on.

[ 11 : 21 ] Because when we see the Lord and know the Lord and see Jesus as the King of King and Lord of Lords, then we begin to realize, here's a place where I can find rest.

Here is a place where, again, I don't have to be restless and in turmoil and tossed here, there, and everywhere, but here is a place I can find rest.

And I begin to see godliness with contentment, as Paul puts it somewhere else, is great gain. that there is so much to be found in godliness and contentment with the Lord.

It is the Lord that can give us peace. And it is the Lord who can save, and save completely, sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not just a case of being saved for today and then go and do as you please. It's the salvation that sanctifies us onwards and onwards.

[ 12 : 32 ] The power of the godliness that we find in His Word that sanctifies us, being more like Him. There was a preacher in Dundee, Robert Murray McShane.

He died at a young age, and yet he was a preacher who stood out and is still spoken about to this day. He was only 29 when he passed away.

And his great desire was always his sanctification. And he put it this way. He described sanctification in this way.

God making us as holy as a saved sinner can be. He never lost sight of his sin and that he was a sinner. But his longing was always God making him holy.

Being sanctified. Becoming more like him. If ever we feel as if we're the complete Christian. If ever we feel with a finished product, then there's something wrong.

[ 13 : 39 ] Because in this world we will never be complete. We will never be finished in that sense. Because we are still sinners. And our desire should always be God making us as holy as a saved sinner can be.

And that's the godliness that we see Paul speaking about here to this church at Thessalonica.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. So when the day of the Lord comes, that you will be presented, kept, blameless, because of him and all that he has done.

The only way to be blameless is through God working in us. There's a powerful reminder to us that God is faithful and God is able.

if you're ever discouraged, maybe you don't see yourself as the finished product. And hopefully that is true of us all.

[ 14 : 53 ] But we shouldn't be so discouraged that we see ourselves as we'll never be the finished product. That we'll never be good enough to appear before God.

And that that would leave us just so discouraged that we're in turmoil. Because we need to see that it's the godliness that God gives. We can also try and live a holy life and just say it's impossible.

I cannot please God. I keep failing God. But that's no bad thing. Because it's then we start to realize that we cannot do it because it is impossible.

So there's got to be another way. Well, it's by being sanctified by him and for him and through him. When we realize it's impossible, we look to Jesus.

And we recognize that he will surely do it. He says here in verse 24, he who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it.

[ 16 : 06 ] And so there is our encouragement that we cannot do it ourselves. But when he calls us, he is faithful and he will surely do it.

We put our trust in him. We are always imperfect. But we are looking to him to sanctify us, to make us as holy as a sinner can be.

Godliness is there for us then before us here, that Paul is reminding the people that they have that they are to desire as they go on. This godliness, this living towards sanctify, being sanctified completely by the Lord.

God. The second thing we see here is the gifts that he reminds them of. And the gifts that they are really to fan and to flame.

And we see, if you like, three gifts here as well in verse 25, 26, and 27. So in their separation, as Paul has been separated from them, there are these gifts that they share together.

[ 17 : 24 ] And they are gifts that we have to this day. Gifts that every body of believers have. And that we share not just among ourselves, but that we share with every believer that there is.

And so Paul is saying that these gifts are to be exercised going forward. And what gifts are they? Surely they stand out quite clearly for us. The first gift there is in verse 25.

Brothers, pray. for us. One of the most precious gifts we have as believers, we pray for one another.

It's a prayer for the gospel to flourish. It's a prayer for his people to flourish. Brothers, pray for us. are you ever afraid to ask someone to pray for you? Or when was the last time you asked someone to specifically pray for something in your life?

[ 18 : 34 ] Because there's nothing greater than we can do for each other. When you hear someone say, I'll pray for you. And when you know it's a genuine, I'll pray for you.

What power there is in that to feel that sense of encouragement, that here is a brother, here is a sister in the Lord who will pray for you. Do we ask one another to pray for each other enough? Here is Paul the apostle. And you say to yourself, well, such a godly man, why would he need prayer? Well, because every one of us needs prayer.

And here he is writing to a church who's young in the faith in many ways. And what's his request? Pray for us. There is a great gift here before us to pray for one another, to pray for the cause of Christ, and to never lose heart in prayer.

when I was in Sunday school in Shabbos, what seems like many years ago now, I had a Sunday school teacher and he was the last, in my last class in Sunday school, I had him.

[ 19 : 48 ] So I was about to leave the Sunday school and go on, on my journey in life. And one thing that stuck with me was this promise that he gave to me, that he would pray for me.

And he gave me a piece of paper, as well. And on the piece of paper was some words just to remind me of the kind of world I was going into.

And the words, some of the words were this, you're starting my boy on life's journey, along the grand highway of life. You'll meet with a thousand temptations, each city with evil is rife.

This world is a stage of excitement, there's danger wherever you go, but if you are tempted to weakness, have courage, my boy, to say no.

He gave me these words and he promised to pray for me. And for a long time, I didn't have that courage to say no. But I still knew that he and others were praying for me.

[ 20 : 58 ] And those prayers were answered. And there's no one here tonight who could say, I don't need your prayers. I don't need to come and share something with you and that you would pray with me in it.

We all need it. Brothers, he says, pray for us. That is one of our greatest gifts. The second gift you see here is the gift of fellowship with God's people.

Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I'm not saying this is something for you to introduce in Barber's where you greet each other with a kiss at the door when you're coming in, but you need to understand what is behind these words.

You need to understand the culture of the day. It was the custom of the time to show a welcome to people, to make them feel at ease and make them feel accepted, that a kiss would be given, a kiss on the cheek or a kiss on the forehead, to make them feel accepted among one another.

Greet the brothers with a holy kiss. So we maybe don't have to give a kiss in that way, but we have other ways to show encouragement and that our fellowship is genuine and warm and welcoming.

[ 22 : 30 ] You have people on the door. They're not there to guard the door and keep people out. They're there to welcome them in. You have a hand to put out, to shake hands with those who come in, whoever they are, to show a warmth in our welcome.

But we have something even more powerful in all of these things. And that is words. And how important our words are.

That just as it was important for the people then to be greeted with a holy kiss, if they weren't kissed, they would not feel welcome.

They would not feel a part of that body. And if you put that into our context today, if someone comes through these doors and nobody says a word to them, how do they feel?

You hear it said in other churches from time to time that someone's come and gone from the church and nobody even spoke to them. And what does that do for them?

[ 23 : 39 ] It makes them feel unwelcome, that no one had an interest in them. But just a simple word, just a little conversation can make all the difference.

to encourage people to have a sense of there's a warmth there, there are people who have an interest in me, there are people who are genuine and warm towards me.

So we have that gift also, that gift of fellowship, and that fellowship should not be exclusive, but inclusive of all who come in.

then you see third gift here, it is the word of God. In verse 27, I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The importance of sharing this word is highlighted for us here. Just to remind you that the church at Thessalonica was made up of people, all kinds of different places, all kinds of different cultures, all kinds of backgrounds.

[ 24 : 52 ] And there was always a danger of division. There was always a danger of cliques being formed, of people forming their own little groups.

In chapter 4, verse 9 to verse 12, there you see Paul speaking to them concerning brotherly love. He says, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that is indeed what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands as we instructed, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

He's there saying to them that they are to continue in this way of having this unity one with another. And what unites them together?

Prayer and fellowship and the Word of God. And that's what we have to this day. All these three verses, as you look at them, they speak about brothers.

[ 26 : 10 ] Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

Now, we're not just talking exclusively male here, we're talking about all people. These are the things, the gifts that we share, and they unite a people together.

they remind us that whatever our background, whatever our situation, whatever our setting, whatever we've come from today, that we can have this togetherness, this fellowship in the gospel. And they are commanded to share all these things together. These gifts are a blessing to them, and they are a blessing to us today as well, to pray, to greet, and to share the Word of God.

So, use these gifts, and these gifts help you, help us to grow in our knowledge of God, and in our sanctifying, our sanctification in Him.

[ 27 : 24 ] So, we have godliness, we have gifts, and then finally, we have grace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul's close to this letter is literally saying, as I started, so I'll finish. Because when you go back to the beginning of this letter, the very first opening verse, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God, in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

So, he begins, grace to you and peace. And then he concludes there in verse 28, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. He begins with grace. He ends with grace. Why? Is he just repeating himself?

Does he have nothing else to offer? Well, he's offering everything there by the grace of God, because grace is a blessing we need from beginning to end.

[ 28 : 47 ] Grace is not just something we need when we start the Christian life. It's not just that we are saved by grace. We are, but we are also kept by grace.

We grow in grace. Grace is in us and should be in us at all times. It's a beginning when we see that our sins are forgiven, but it's also, as the hymn writer describes, it is grace that leads us home.

We are dependent on this grace. So are there any better words to leave them with than that? The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The benediction at the end of this letter, it's all about grace. It's not just hollow words. It's not like you see in a story book that just, when you finish, it says, the end.

Or it's not just like a normal letter where you see yours faithfully or yours sincerely. Here we have the heart of the gospel. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

[ 30 : 02 ] What is grace? Why is grace seen so much through the gospel? Well, grace is God's free gift to us in Jesus Christ.

It's not just any grace, it's the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. God's He lived for us a life we couldn't live.

He died a death that He didn't deserve. That we might receive a forgiveness that we had no part in, that we paid nothing for, that we might have an eternal fellowship with Him that we did not deserve. All at His expense, all freely offered to us in the gospel by grace. Grace that forgives and grace that keeps, grace that empowers and makes us willing, grace without which we are lost.

The grace of our Lord is a precious thing. One commentator puts it like this, he says, Paul does not simply wish strength or prosperity on them, but rather invokes a blessing on them for what they needed most, the grace that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 31 : 29 ] This letter began with his desire for grace and peace, and here is there, it summarizes the essence of the faith they have received. The person of Jesus, the Lord, and Christ is the fountain from which the grace of God flows out to them.

This benediction is far from being a formality tacked at the end of the letter. The blessing of grace from the Lord Jesus Christ embraces the fullness of the salvation that comes from the one who is the soul and sovereign Savior.

That is how precious this grace is. It comes from the one who is the soul and sovereign Savior. It is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why does the preacher pronounce the benediction at the end of the service? Why are our arms raised when we do so? Because it is a pronouncement.

It is a longing from the preacher. It is a longing from God. Just as we see with Paul here, it is a desire that we are parted with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ until we meet again.

[ 32 : 55 ] And that is what Paul is saying at the conclusion of his letter here. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul's last word is grace. And this evening it is our last word.

But as we see all that we have before us here, as we think of how difficult goodbyes can be, that as we go our separate ways this evening we do so remembering the goodness of God, the godliness that he desires for us, the gifts that he has given us to encourage and remember one another. And above all the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that keeps us. May we know more of it and grow in it.

Let us pray. Lord our gracious God, we do thank you that you are indeed a God of all grace and that that grace is the fullness of that salvation that comes from the one who is the soul and sovereign Savior.

[ 34 : 16 ] It is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And may we be built up in it and know it all the more each and every day that grace that saves us, that grace that keeps us, that grace that will lead us home.

For we ask all in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 28, the Scottish Psalter version, page 238 of the psalm books.

We'll sing from verse 7 to the end of the psalm. psalm. Psalm 28 at verse 7, page 238. The Lord's my strength and shield, my heart, upon him did rely, and I am helped, hence my heart doth joy exceedingly.

We'll sing from verse 7 to the end of the psalm to God's praise. verse 7. Amen. The Lord's my strength and shield my heart, upon him did rely, on thy help.

I am help, it ends my heart, the joy exceedingly.

[ 35 : 56 ] And with my soul I will embrace the strength is God alone.

He also is the saving strength of his anointed one.

O thine own people do the save bless thine inheritance!

Them also do Thou feed on them forever more advance!

grace, mercy from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forever more.

[ 37 : 22 ] Amen. holy