

SERMON THEME: FACING THE END WITH SOBRIETY

SERMON TITLE: THE PEACE AND PRESENCE OF GOD, BY REV DR BERNARD CHAO

SERMON TEXT: 2 THESSALONIANS 3:16-18 (NIV)

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

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

PROLOGUE

- Recap lessons from this sermon *theme*:
 - We witnessed the Thessalonians Christians' experience in persecution, their struggle with and reaction to the differences in beliefs and philosophies, and the challenges in life.
 - 2 Thessalonians contains Paul's praises for their endurance under persecution, and encouragement that God's justice will prevail in the end – the Christian eschatology.
 - The Day of the Lord *will* come and Jesus *will* return with certainty.
 - The return of Jesus is not something we fear, but it is our hope in the face of:
 - Evil,
 - Lawless rebellion against the reign and way of God,
 - Idolatry.
 - This letter ends in a benediction, expressing Paul's personal affection and care for the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica, and his personal prayer for the church.
 - In view of the Christian eschatology, Paul calls for the Thessalonians (and for us) to stand firm and hold fast to God's teachings, pray continuously, and live out our faith.
 - We are different because we follow Jesus, we must *live out* the Godly life in a society that promotes a lifestyle running contrary to the Godly way of life.
- In today's text, we examine Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians to experience God's "peace at all times and in every way".

A. ENJOYING THE PEACE OF GOD IN THIS BUSY WORLD

- We live in a world that celebrates busyness – information overload, social media overload, decision overload, work overload, entertainment overload, parenting/parent overload, studies/tuition overload, and even church overload.
 - Our digital lifestyle has added multiple demands on our time-scarce lives, with many things competing for our attention.
 - Where does this stop?
 - At some point, we must learn how to say 'no' to ourselves, as well as to others (e.g., Dr Thomas D'Orazio's response in his family's group chat).
- Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians drives home on one of the most important disciplines of our lives – We need peace and knowledge of when to reject/shun the things that threatens peace.
 - We preserve our peace by *learning what is beneficial* in retaining this peace, and in so, *acquiring the ability to recognize* what disrupts this peace.
 - "...We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to fulfil them all. And we are unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow...we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of

unhurried serenity and peace and power. If only we could slip over into... this deep Center of living, where the fretful calls of life are integrated, where No as well as Yes can be said with confidence..." – Thomas Kelly.

- Jesus showed us what is the one priority of His life – to spend time with the Father.
 - Mark 1:32-37 reveals Jesus' priority by detailing His commitment for a personal time of prayer and communion with God, amid the busy schedule of His ministry.
 - Jesus knew what would nourish His soul and life and prioritized personal communion with God in His busy schedule.
 - He went about it unknown to the rest, in entering a solitary place at the undisturbed hours of the morning.
 - King David is another good example of someone who seeks to be with God even though he had many matters to attend to, with Psalm 23 showing us a snippet of how he prioritizes personal communion with God.
 - As followers of Jesus, we are called to live out our lives according to God's way and teachings.
 - "A true Christian is a person who is right-side-up, in a world that is up-side-down." – Unknown.

B. TENDING TO YOUR INNER GARDEN

- We all have this eternal and intangible spiritual centre, where we converse and walk intimately with our Heavenly Father.
 - We call it our 'soul', Paul calls it 'his inner being', King David called it his 'green pastures/quiet waters'.
 - It is a place where:
 - Our personal prayer occurs.
 - Quiet time with God happens.
 - We struggle with our circumstances and seek solace from God.
 - We find peace in Christ.
 - A metaphor by Gordon MacDonald describes this spiritual centre aptly – *Our inner garden*.
- Our inner garden, however, is often cluttered and noisy with the events of our lives, instead of being filled with the peace of God.
 - "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God, you'll be at rest." – Corrie Ten Boom.
 - Many times, we remind ourselves of the need to draw near and spend personal time with God, only to end up being distracted by the other things clawing at our attention.
 - When we finally have time to be quiet, we may be afraid of entering this inner garden to be close to the Lord, because we have grown estranged from it.
 - We have to make deliberate practices to:
 - Dwell in this place of rest,
 - This spiritual discipline of slowing down,
 - Be familiar with the rhythm of peace and the presence of God.
 - How is your inner garden?
 - *We already know of the presence of our inner garden but need convincing to put in effort in maintaining the peace within it.*
- Psalm 23 points clearly what happens when we choose to spend time in our inner garden with God.

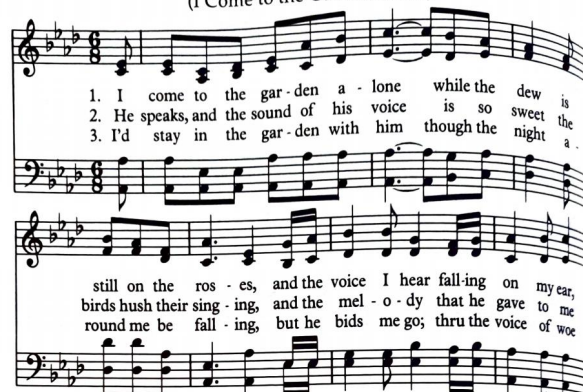
- God will meet our every need and give us heavenly rest for our tired and frazzled soul.
- We will experience peace and quiet from the depth of our soul and be restored completely.
- The God of universe will grant guidance on how to live our lives, and gift to us divine discipline and encouragement.
- We will receive also such courage that dispels all fear of death and tribulations, overflowing from the knowledge that God is walking right next to us.
- He nourishes us so abundantly, that we will seek to protect, grow, and to stay in this space with Him.
- Have you been spending time in your inner garden?
 - It is not part of a checklist or a to-do list, but an intimate time to be spent seeking God.
 - It is there that our Lord meets our every need.
 - If you desire the peace and presence of God and desire for Paul's prayer to be yours, tend to your inner garden, and meet the Lord in this sacred space.
 - May Hymn 314 "In the Garden" be a call and reminder for us to preserve and seek God in our own inner gardens.

CHRIST'S GRACIOUS LIFE

314

In the Garden

(I Come to the Garden Alone)



1. I come to the gar-den a-lone while the dew is
 2. He speaks, and the sound of his voice is so sweet the
 3. I'd stay in the gar-den with him though the night a-

still on the ros-es, and the voice I hear fall-ing on my ear,
 birds hush their sing-ing, and the mel-o-dy that he gave to me
 round me be fall-ing, but he bids me go; thru the voice of woe



the Son of God dis-clos-es. And he walks with me, and he
 with-in my heart is ring-ing. his voice to me is call-ing.

talks with me, and he tells me I am his own; and the

joy we share as we tar-ry there, none oth-er has ev-er known.

WORDS: C. Austin Miles, 1913 (Jn. 20:11-18)
 MUSIC: C. Austin Miles, 1913; adapt. by Charles H. Webb, 1987
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GARDEN
 89.557 with Refrain

"I dare to say, that it is possible, for those who really are willing to lean on the power of the Lord for keeping and victory, to lead a life in which His promises are taken as they stand and are found to be true.

It is possible to cast all our care on Him daily and to enjoy deep peace in doing it. It is possible to have the thoughts and imaginations of our hearts purified, in the deepest meaning of the word through faith.

It is possible to see the will of God in everything, and to receive it, not with sighing, but with singing. It is possible in the inner life of desire and feeling to lay aside all bitterness and wrath and anger and evil speaking, every day and every hour.

It is possible by taking complete refuge in Divine power to become strong through and through; and, where previously our greatest weakness lay, to find that the things which formerly upset all our resolves to be patient, or pure, or humble, furnish today an opportunity to make sin powerless – through Him who loved us, and works in us an agreement with His will and a blessed sense of His presence and His power.

These things are divine possibilities, and because they are His work, the true experience of them will always cause us to bow lower at His feet and to learn to thirst and long for more.

We cannot possibly be satisfied with anything less than to walk with God – each day, each hour, each moment, in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

– H. C. G. Moule.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What areas of life do you feel sometimes overwhelmed by and robs you of your inner peace?
2. What does your inner garden look like?
3. Share with each other what helps you spend time in the garden with our Lord.