

Birth, Death Birth Life

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Okay, as I mentioned, we're finishing up the book of First Thessalonians. Guess which the next book is. Second Thessalonians. But today we're in first. And as I was working on this message, I don't know why, but I was reminded of my time in Montana.

And there's a few larger cities in Montana, not that large, but most of them are just small towns out in the country. And often we would visit one of those towns for something. And then we discovered that there was a little cemetery up on the hill. And we would take some time to walk over that cemetery and look at the gravestones. And of course, they went back to the 1860s, 1870s.

I know there were some inscriptions on the gravestones. I can't remember them, but I do remember at one Graveyard, there were five stones. They were five kids that all died in 1917. One family. The Spanish flu wiped out somebody's family.

And I can't even begin to imagine how hard that must have been on those families to lose all their kids in one month. Looked like they were about 5 to 15 somewhere in that lane. This isn't original with me, but as I looked at those gravestones, what do you normally see on a gravestone? The day you were born and the day you died. Right.

But there's a little dash in between that and that. Dash may be short, it may be long, but that is our life, the life that we lived. And doesn't say anything to us, but in a lot of ways, it says everything we need to know. And so we have birth, we have life, we have death. And unless somebody's come to Jesus Christ, we have hell.

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That's their life. That's the summary of that. But the more I thought about that, for us Christians, we've got birth. And there's that black line there. And then there's a red cross when we came to Jesus Christ.

And the line has changed from black to red. And, yeah, we still die, but then there's glory. There's glory. And so I want to look at that today. That red line signifies or symbolizes sanctification in your life.

I'm going to read that again. It says, now, may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. That's what that red line is. He is sanctifying us 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, and he will surely do it. And so Paul is praying. He's closing up his letter to The Thessalonians with a prayer, and he prays that they would be sanctified by God. Sanctification is one of the great words of the Bible. Another one is justification.

And when you put your faith in Christ, you are justified. That is a legal declaration that you are just in his sight, that you're no longer going to be judged for your sins. And then on the other side of that, we have a word. Glorification. Justification.

Glorification. Glorification is when we finally leave this world, whether Christ comes back or we die. And we come into God's presence and we are glorified with the Lord Jesus Christ, and we look forward to that. But in between that, if you're a believer, you have this period of sanctification, and that's where God is changing you from glory to glory. It says in Second Corinthians, chapter three, he's making you more like Christ, and we can thank him for that.

There's that song, He's Changing Me from glory to glory. And if you're a Christian, that's true of you. Somewhere along that line, that red line, you are there, and God is doing a work in your life. So I want us to look at Paul's prayer for us. And first of all, we see it is addressed to the God of peace.

He prays to the God of peace. And that signifies that true peace can only come through Jesus Christ in our life. Mankind longs for peace. They do everything they can to get peace. Peace, peace.

It'll say in Second Thessalonians when there is no peace, because only God can give peace. And when Jesus, before Jesus was crucified, he told the disciples, and he told you and I, peace, I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives to you, I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Worldly peace is based on our circumstances, isn't it? Everything's going great, and there's no threat in my life, and I feel wonderful. And we say, I'm at peace until those circumstances change. And all of a sudden things aren't going well and people lose their peace. Godly peace is not based on our circumstances.

It's based on our relationship to Jesus Christ. And he gives peace to all his children who cry out to him. Now some of us are going to protest. Wait a second. I'm a Christian and I'm not experiencing peace.

Anyone say Amen to that? I think we all have been in that place, haven't we, where no peace, none at all. And we have to ask ourselves, what's wrong? Is that promise not real? Did we miss it somehow?

Is there something we have to do to experience it? Well, we get a clue. In this passage, after addressing God as the God of peace, Paul asks God to sanctify you and I completely. Not partly, but completely, fully, through and through. One version says, and sanctification is a process, and it begins the day you were born again, and it won't end until that day you see Jesus Christ.

And again, he's changing us to be more like Christ. And that's true of every Christian. We don't all progress the same. We're looking at quenching the Spirit. And if we're quenching the Spirit, we're not going to see it working as well as it should.

If you want real peace, though, if you really want peace, sanctification is the key to receiving it. I like what Richard Phillips says in one of the commentaries, says holiness

and peace are inseparable. Believers cannot experience the peace of God except in the pursuit and experience of God's holiness. The reason so many Christians are not experiencing peace is because they've made that their goal instead of Jesus Christ and being changed to be more and more like him. And if you'll make knowing God the purpose of your life, one of the things that benefits out of that is the peace of God in your life.

You don't pursue peace, you pursue Christ. And he gives us the peace that is beyond understanding. After that, Paul prays that your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sanctification is just a process that leads to a goal. A process that leads to the goal.

The goal is to be able to stand before Jesus Christ, blameless at his coming. And of course, we know that he's taken all of our sins, but there's a sense that you and I need to be working our salvation out, becoming more and more like Him. One day, our line, whether it's black or whether it's red, it's going to come to the end and there'll be death. And the moment that happens, we'll stand before Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us, if you're an unbeliever, he'll say, depart from me, I never knew you, and be thrown into hell.

If you're a believer, your works are going to be tested. What did you do for me? Did you do what I asked? He's not going to ask us. Did you have a lot of fun down there?

Okay. And he's not going to ask if you were successful. He's not going to ask did you do a good job? Did you try your hardest? No.

What he's going to ask is, did you accomplish the purposes for your life that I had? Did you fulfill my will in your life? That's different for every one of us. We can't judge that based on what someone else is doing. It's based on what God wants to do through us.

Jesus told his disciples, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask, the Father in My name, he may give to you. And the truth is, if you come to Jesus Christ, it's because he chose you. And you responded to that invitation. But he chose

you. And he had a purpose in that.

And the purpose is that you would bear fruit, spiritual fruit, for God. And again, that's different in each one of our lives. But that means that we have to be set apart with the desire to do the will of God. Now, notice here that Paul prays for our whole spirit and soul and body. And theologians argue over this.

And the one hand, some theologians, they say we're dichomatis, dichematis, theologian word, meaning we're two parts. Two parts our body, and then the soul and the spirit, they're one by themselves. Others believe that we're trichotomous spirit, soul and body. And they use this passage to back that up. And still an argument that goes on among theologians.

And I'm not going to be able to solve it. But I believe that we are three parts, spirit, soul and body. And the reason I believe that is when you were saved, God made you alive in your spirit. Before that, you were dead. You had no desire for God.

And then he began the work of changing your soul, giving you the mind of Christ, becoming more and more like Jesus. And finally, one day our bodies will be saved. We'll no longer be in this body of weakness with all the problems we experience, but we will be like Christ, with a glorified body and the sense we can say, I've been saved, I'm being saved, and I will be saved. And the process that we're all going through, if we know the Lord Jesus Christ. And so he prays that it would be kept blameless until the day of Christ, and not based on what we've done, but based on what he has done for us.

And we thank God for that. Finally, Paul ends up with verse 24. He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. What a great promise.

And the fact is, as Christians, we're on that line. And it's not just a straight, smooth line, is it? There's ups and there's downs and there's problems and there's joys and there's all of those things. And sometimes when it's down, we get discouraged, don't we? And the devil starts speaking to us, you're not going to make it.

You can't be faithful. You'll never finish well. And if we're not careful, we start to listen to him and we lose our peace, don't we? But the fact is, it's God who has to do the work in us. Yes, we have to work it out, but it's God who does the work in us.

And if it was up to us, none of us would be able to defeat the sin in our life. It's just too powerful. We trust in God to complete the work he began. First Philippians 1:6 is one of my favorite verses. And he says, I am sure of this.

I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. That he will complete the work. If God could not complete the work that he began in our lives, he wouldn't be God. Nothing is impossible for God. And what a wonderful promise.

And again, sometimes we're feeling weak, we're struggling, we're discouraged, and we think, I can't go on. And we can lay hold of this promise. Wait a second. The God who started my work is going to finish the work. And I'm trusting in him, not trusting in myself.

And so that's when we go through those times. That's when we should embrace the promise that God is faithful and will surely do it. That gives us encouragement no matter what we're facing in life. And so he finishes this prayer with brothers, Pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

I put you under oath before the Lord. Before this letter is read to all the brothers. See anything there that is repeated in those three verses?

Brothers, the fact is, if you're a believer, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. And if we're brothers and sisters in Christ, what does that mean? Spiritually, we're related to one another. We're family and we're dependent. Just as Aaron shared, we're dependent on one another to make it.

There's times that we are weak, but thank God there's someone that's strong that comes by and helps lift us up during that time. One of the great encouragements that I'm experiencing right now is with Ann Berger Ring, and she's got cancer, and she's in

a hospital bed and probably looking at dying. We don't know when, but just amazed that the Christians who have come alongside and helped her in her time of need, and what a blessing that is to her. But it's also a blessing to the whole body as everyone does the work that God has given them to do. And so he prays.

First of all, he says, brothers, pray for us. He's been praying for them, and now he's asking them to pray for him. And the fact is, we all need each other's prayers, okay? And I'm finding if some. If God puts somebody in my mind, then he's probably asking me to pray for them.

And often someone will come on my mind. And what I do is I call them and I say, God put you in my mind. Can I pray with you? And of course you can pray with me. And I don't know in the spiritual realm what's happening.

I just know that we're called to pray for each other, and we need each other's prayers. And as a pastor, I covet your prayers because I know that on my own, I can't do a job that, you know, prepares all of us for eternity. It's got to be God working in each one of us. The second thing he says, greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. Okay, that was kind of cultural back then.

And some nations still do that. You'll see them do this and do that on each side, a way of acknowledging the worth of somebody else. We may hug someone or shake their hands, but the whole point is we greet one another. We acknowledge that they're our brother or our sister, that we care about them, that we love them and we want the best for them. And this isn't one of the 10 suggestions.

It's a commandment that we do that. And I would challenge you and encourage you. When the service is over, don't see how fast you can get out of here. Okay? That restaurant will still be open an hour from now.

You know, take a little time to greet somebody. Hey, it's good to see you. How are you doing? You know, things going well for you? And we should greet each other.

We don't have a professional greeter out here. When you come into church, some churches do, and, boy, they're looking. Is that a new person? You know, and they come running up and they got their greeter spiel and, you know, hand you a bulletin or whatever. But the fact is, is we should all be greeting each other and thanking God that he's working in your life.

And he brought you together today as the family of God to worship him. And so that's a command. And then he says, Number 27, I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. And to be put under oath is a strong statement, isn't it? You're under oath.

And he's saying, read this letter, study this word, share this word with others. And we're not here to give our opinion on things or what's the latest thing that people are interested in or, you know, what will make you feel happy. We are here to share the word of God because only the word of God can touch our lives and sanctify us. That leads to peace. And so we're told to read the word here.

And then finally he says, he ends the letter with, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. And I've been conscious all of my life as a pastor anyway, how much I need the grace of God. Without the grace of God, you can do nothing. You won't accomplish anything. You'll stand before Jesus ashamed that all your efforts amounted to nothing.

It's only his grace working in our life. And someone once said, if you want to experience the grace of God, you need to extend the grace of God to others. And I think that's one of the ways that we experience that. And so we finish this letter. And again, amazing letter.

He spends a couple chapters thanking God for the Thessalonians. He clears up some misconceptions about the second coming of Jesus Christ. And then he tells us how to be the body of Christ. And we need to put that into practice, especially in these last days. So I close this letter with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your grace. I look back on my life and realize that I didn't have the gifts, the ability, the strength to do your work. And I would have quit many times. And yet your grace was at work in my life. I know there were people praying for me.

I know you gave me a desire to be in your word. And I thank you for the body of Christ, for brothers and sisters who come alongside and they would greet you and encourage you and help you. What a wonderful thing that is. Help us not to take it for granted. And so, God, I pray that your grace would be working in each of our lives.

Through the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ's name, amen.