

God's Bountiful Gifts

Genesis 19:1–3, 12–26; 2 Thessalonians 3:16–18

The title of our sermon today is “God’s Bountiful Gifts.” I remember as a boy the year I got a chemistry set and a wind-up wristwatch for Christmas. I thought it was pretty cool. Yet within time the test-tubes broke, the chemicals were used up, and the wristwatch wouldn’t run anymore.

The De Beers diamond mines used to have a slogan: “a diamond is forever,” and maybe it is—though the day is coming when “all the elements will melt with fervent heat,” and plenty of diamonds have been given as tokens of undying love which later proved not to be undying.

But *God’s* bountiful gifts will never disappoint, will never run out, and will never need to be replaced. As we look at our text this morning I have three points: (1) The Lord gives peace; (2) The Lord gives grace; (3) The Lord gives his presence. First,

1. The Lord gives peace.

“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.” A few weeks ago we talked about the unique expression “the Lord of peace.” This is its only occurrence in the Bible. But today let us focus on the second part: “*give* you peace always in every way.” Peace is a gift. It cannot be purchased nor merited; it comes from the Lord of peace Himself. That is its only source.

The Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory who came into this world to save sinners. It was the Lord Jesus who said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). No one else in all of human history could say this. No one else could give the gift of peace. The peace that Christ gives is his very own: he identifies it as “*my* peace I give unto you.”

Peace is a state of tranquility or quiet, and man cannot truly attain this apart from Christ. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isa. 57:20). As noted by Calvin, the wicked have “continual war and incessant uneasiness and distress of heart.”¹ Man tries to drown out his unease with music, distractions, and carnal pleasures, but they do not satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart. As Augustine expressed it, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”

How is *your* heart? Is it restless? Is there incessant uneasiness and distress of heart? Is there a nagging feeling that something is wrong—wars without, turbulence within? Your only answer is Christ. He alone can calm a troubled conscience, he alone can “give you peace always in every way.” He alone can take away the enmity that separates you from your God; in him alone are “mercy and

¹ Calvin, Commentary, Isa. 57:20

truth” met together, and “righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10). Manmade remedies deal with symptoms; God’s remedy deals with the root cause—alienation from God and from our neighbor. In Christ alone are we reconciled to God and reconciled to our fellow man. Christ can accomplish what tranquilizers and sedatives cannot do, and that is give us peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You need to know that you are alienated with God because of your sins. “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). The only way that you can have peace with God is to have your sins laid on Christ, and his perfect righteousness credited to you. “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3)—and so it can be for you, if you come to God through the only Mediator, acknowledge your sins and ask him to save you. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Become part of a faithful, Bible-preaching church and put yourself under the oversight of faithful elders. Through the preaching of the Gospel you will know the forgiveness of your sins, and through learning God’s truth you will learn to live at peace with your fellow-man. You can stop depending on chemicals and learn to depend on God, fellowshiping with him through the ordinary means of grace: the Word, the sacraments and prayer. More than one of the saints here today can testify how practicing the faith has changed their life. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”²—new habits, new loves, new associations, new delights. You will experience the peace that passes all understanding—peace that you never before knew even existed.

The Lord gives peace; secondly,

2. The Lord gives grace.

The second letter to the Thessalonians ends as it began: after identifying the author and addressee, the body of the epistle begins with “*Grace* to you and *peace*.” Now it ends as it began: with the words “may the Lord of peace Himself give you *peace*,” closely followed by “the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” The epistle begins with “grace and peace”; it ends with “peace and grace”—a literary device that repeats ideas in reverse order: A–B, then B–A. But do not miss that the first concept in this little book is “grace,” and the last concept likewise is “grace”; 2 Thessalonians begins and ends with “grace.”

The word grace (χάρις) is an important word which occurs 156 times in the New Testament. It is usually translated *grace*, but it can also be translated *favor*, *thanks*, *pleasure*, *lovingkindness*, etc., depending on the context. James Strong defined it as “the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence

² 2 Cor. 5:17

upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.” Yes, grace is God’s merciful kindness. It is received only through regeneration: the Spirit’s exerting his holy influence upon men, women, boys and girls dead in trespasses and sins. Grace turns sinners to Christ. It keeps, strengthens and increases disciples in Christian faith, in knowledge of God’s truth, in affection and love for God and for his people, and kindles God’s people to the exercise of Christian virtues. That’s a lot of benefits from a single thing: grace! In the words of the old hymn, “Amazing grace!—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”³ You’ve probably sung that song dozens or hundreds of times. Maybe it sounds “old hat.” But it expresses a biblical truth: that our salvation is all of grace. We like it so much that we made it the URL of our church’s website: all-of-grace.org. Paul captured it well when he wrote, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). You cannot mix works and grace. Either salvation is all of grace, or it is all of works. If it is all of works, then no one can be saved, because our works always fall short of God’s standard of absolute perfection. Paul took pains to explain that it is “*not* of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:9), that “man is *not* justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16). The Christian faith is not based on merit but on grace. Grace is *unmerited* favor. Nobody ever received grace because he deserved it!

Remember the story of Lot, read before the sermon? We read that two angels came to the wicked city of Sodom to pay a visit to a man named Lot. Lot was Abraham’s nephew. He and Abraham had parted when their wealth increased and the ground could not support their expanding flocks and herds. At that point Abraham said to Lot, “Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.” Lot chose the well-watered plain of Jordan, going toward Sodom, while Abraham dwelt in the land of Canaan. Eventually, Lot moved to Sodom.⁴

So the two angels met Lot, sitting in the city gate of Sodom. The city gate was the place where judicial matters were decided. The fact that Lot was sitting there indicates that by this time he was an *insider*, respected in his community. Lot invited the visitors into his home. (Hospitality was a highly-prized virtue in the Middle East.)

The angels told Lot the purpose of their visit. They were going to destroy the city of Sodom because of its wickedness. Lot should take his family and get out. He told his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, but they were not

³ <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/amazing-grace/>

⁴ Gen. 13:9–12

interested. When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, lest he die with his fellow-citizens. Note particularly verse 16, “While he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.” Lot still didn’t fully understand his danger. He didn’t want to escape to the mountains, he wanted to live in a nearby town, Zoar. The destroying angels granted this request also.

Here is a picture of salvation. The *angels* took the initiative. They came to Lot. They explained to him that they were going to destroy Sodom. They strongly urged Lot to flee. When he hesitated, they took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand and the hands of his two daughters. The LORD was being merciful to him. Lot didn’t deserve it. He was reckless and incautious in moving into Sodom in the first place. The LORD determined to save Lot and took the initiative. So it is with us as well. The gospel comes to us: “Flee from the wrath to come.” God graciously tells us that this world in which we live is going to be destroyed by fire. Yet we like it here. We are comfortable here. We do not fully realize our danger. Who made us to differ from the world, that we were saved? All of us were equally undeserving. We were not better or more worthy of eternal life. But God had mercy on us. He determined to save us by his grace.

Even after the angels escorted Lot and his family out of the city and told him, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you . . . Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed,” Lot was balky. He said to the angels, “Please, no, my lords!” The attraction and pull of the world was strong.

We see the same with Noah. At his time the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and the LORD determined to destroy it with a flood. But God took the initiative. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8). God determined to save Noah and his family.

And so it was in the case of the Thessalonians. The apostle Paul pronounces the benediction: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Did the Thessalonians ask for it? No. God took the initiative. Salvation is all of grace.

Clearly, *nobody* deserves salvation. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). What was lost in Adam is regained in Christ. God breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul, capable of fellowship with the God of heaven. Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed regular fellowship with God in the cool of the day. Man was given breath so that he could praise God. Fellowship in the Garden consisted of prayer and praise, learning about God, worshipping God for his glorious attributes and enjoying God’s favor and fellowship. But when man sinned, he forfeited God’s good gifts. He became alienated from God and from the life of God.

Sinful man has no claim upon God. He cannot demand that God save him. Apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, man is spiritually dead and does not know the depth of his depravity. The only way that man can be saved is by *grace*—God’s unmerited favor. According to the Bible, good works are the *fruit*, not the *ground* or *basis* of salvation. Salvation is *by grace, through faith, unto* good works. The order is important. It is “by grace,” not by anything that we deserve. It is “through faith”; faith, wrought by the Holy Spirit in the grace of regeneration, a faith that looks to Christ alone.

R. C. Sproul put it well: faith is “a sufficient condition for justification. That is, when we put our faith and trust in Christ, God will most surely declare us justified in his sight. The Reformation view, which is the biblical view, is that if faith is present, justification is inevitably present as well.”⁵

So salvation is *by grace*, and *through* faith; thirdly, it is *unto* good works. If a person is saved, that is, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, then he will inevitably do good works—those things that are pleasing in God’s sight. As Jesus put it, “Ye shall know them by their *fruits*” (Matt. 7:16). A good tree will bring forth good fruit. If a church teaches that you have to do good works *in order to be saved*, then you’re in the wrong church. Good works are absolutely necessary—as the *fruit* of salvation.

So we’ve seen, the Lord gives peace, the Lord gives grace. Thirdly,

3. The Lord gives his presence.

Notice the last six words of verse 16, “The Lord be with you all.” Here is the promise of the Lord’s *presence*. This truth is of great comfort to the believer. This is a *benediction*, the utterance or bestowing of a blessing. Now what authority did the apostle Paul have to bestow a blessing? Well, because God blesses his people, his people can in turn bless one another. We can pray with the Psalmist, “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!” We bless God, because he has first blessed us.

In Genesis 28 we read, “Then Isaac called Jacob and *blessed* him, and charged him, and said to him: ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; *and give you the blessing of Abraham*, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.’”

Later in that same chapter, when Jacob has the vision of the ladder reaching to heaven, God says, “I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of

⁵ R.C. Sproul, “The Instrumental Cause of Justification” (<https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/instrumental-cause-justification> accessed 1-12-24)

Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. *Behold, I am with you* and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”

Here is the promise of God’s presence: “Behold, I am *with you*.”

In Genesis 49, the dying Jacob blessed each of his twelve sons. We, too, can bless one another in accordance with God’s word.

But God’s blessing is original. It is not based on anything else. At the close of Psalm 133:3, in speaking of Mount Zion—the church—we read: “for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life forevermore.” Mere humans can’t command the blessing of eternal life on the basis of our own authority, but we can share the message of the gospel with lost sinners, blessing them with the truth: if you, a sinner, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!

Here is the blessing of God’s presence: the Lord gives his presence. He is present with the church. He says, “lo, *I am with you always*, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

In Hebrews 13:5 the writer to the Hebrews says, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*”

In Deuteronomy 31:6 Moses blesses the people with the words “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, *he it is that doth go with thee*; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. . . . And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; *he will be with thee*, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.”

As we go through this uncertain earthly life there is one thing that we can be certain of, and that is the presence of Christ, even in trials. Here is the presence that cannot be taken away.

In Joshua 1:5 God encourages the man Joshua, who had such big shoes to fill. He tells him, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: *as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*”

In 1 Samuel 12:22 we read: “For *the LORD will not forsake his people* for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.” What is the basis on which the LORD will not forsake his people: “his great name’s sake”—not because we always deserve it, but on account of his great name, his great reputation.

In 1 Chronicles 28:20 David said to Solomon, “Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, *will be with*

thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.”

In Psalm 37:25 the Psalmist testifies, “I have been young, and now am old; *yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken*, nor his seed begging bread.” God promises to be with his people during times of shortage, times of famine. God’s presence is not just for the good times. Later in the same Psalm we read, “For the LORD loveth judgment, and *forsaketh not his saints*; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.”

In Isaiah 41:10 the LORD says, “Fear thou not; for *I am with thee*: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Oh, brothers and sisters, let the Word of God minister to you. The Lord gives peace; the Lord gives grace; the Lord gives his presence. Come to him. Amen.