THE LORD IS FAITHFUL

2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

Key Verse: 3:3

“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.”

Thank God for helping us to know that the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, will be revealed and the Lord Jesus will overthrow him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him with the splendour of his coming. Thank God for encouraging us to love the truth and stand firm in the love of God – that from the beginning, he chose us to be saved, while the secret power of lawlessness is at work increasingly. In today’s passage Paul recaps that the Lord is faithful and he urges the Thessalonians to work with responsibility and gives the final greeting of peace and grace. We see again Paul’s desire for them, as their shepherd.

**First, the faithful Lord (1-5).** Paul says in verses 1 and 2, “Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.” Here “finally” has the meaning of “for the rest” “besides that”, so in 2011 NIV “for other matters.” It marks a transition from the doctrinal content concerning eschatological things to the practical agenda.

Again verse 1 says, “Finally, brothers, pray for us…” In this last chapter of 2 Thessalonians, Paul requests the prayer of the Thessalonians. As we thought of in 1 Thessalonians 5:25, “pray for us”, those who are truly humble and know the power of prayer can ask for others’ prayer support. This shows their dependence on God. We are also reminded of 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray continually.” We are to pray continually and request prayer support continually.

This time there is a clear prayer topic, “the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you.” The message of the Lord, or the word of the Lord must be delivered rapidly without delay and without hindrance. In ancient times, a king’s word or message had to be delivered as rapidly as possible. How much more the word of the Lord, the message of the Lord! Psalm 147:15 says, “He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.” The good news of Jesus’ resurrection had to be delivered quickly. So an angel of the Lord said to the women to came to the tomb, “He is not here; he has risen…Then go quickly and tell his disciples…” (Mt. 28:6,7). Paul wanted to preach the gospel in Rome so that the gospel of the Lord might spread rapidly to the whole world through Roman roads. Indeed, Paul came to Rome. Acts ends with these words in 28:30, 31, “For two whole years Paul stayed there in in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” Consequently, the Reformation was possible because printing had already been invented prior to that. In our time, the gospel of Christ Jesus spread rapidly through the internet, YouTube, Zoom and other online means. The message of the Lord spreading rapidly is none other than the heart of God.

And “the message/the word of the Lord be honoured” simply means that the word of the Lord may be accepted and welcomed in the hearts of the hearers, just as it was by the Thessalonians. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, “…our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction…in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” Paul also said in 2:13, “…when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” May the word of the Lord truly be honoured among us, too!

Paul also asked them to pray that the gospel messengers might be delivered from wicked/perverse/unreasonable and evil people, for not everyone had faith. Certainly, people are not all like the Thessalonians. Paul wrote the two epistles of Thessalonians from Corinth, where he confronted strong opposition in preaching the gospel (Acts 18:6). Even there was an uproar against Paul (Acts 18:12). This reminds us that preaching the gospel is a fierce spiritual battle against gospel enemies. We pray to raise gospel fighters among us, including our children.

Subsequently Paul says in verse 3, “But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.” “The Lord is faithful” is a unique expression in the Bible, written here. It is not easy to find those who are in high positions or on thrones faithful. But the Lord, King of kings and Lord of Lords, is faithful. He is called Faithful and True (Rev 19:11). People change, but not the Lord. According to Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.” According to Revelation, “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (1:4, 8; 4:8). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (22:13). God is faithful. Our Lord Jesus is faithful.

Paul had said in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “The one who called you is faithful and he will do it.” 1 Corinthians 1:9 says, “God, who called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” and 10:13 says, “…God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” He remembers all about how he led us and will fulfill his purpose for each of us. We are to keep his words of promise in our heart however difficult our situations may be.

In Hebrews 11:11, even though Sarah was past childbearing age and barren, Abraham and Sarah considered Him faithful who had made the promise. So from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore (11:12). The Israelites were unfaithful to God, but God was faithful to them until Christ Jesus was born of Mary, the wife of Joseph, who was a descendant of David, the son of Abraham. The genealogy of Jesus attests to God’s faithfulness over 42 generations (3x14) – from Abraham to David, from David to the time of exile to Babylon, and from the exile to the time of Christ’s birth. God is faithful and the Lord Jesus is faithful. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:13, “if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”

The faithful Lord can strengthen us and protect us from the evil one, while none other can. Paul confessed in 2 Timothy 4:16-17, “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me…But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength…” David confessed in Psalm 23, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me…Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” It does not mean that there will not be suffering and hardships in life. But even amid hardships and trials in life, we can be assured that surely goodness and love will follow us all the days of life until we dwell in the house of the Lord, because the Lord is faithful. When we lose our sight of the Lord, things become obscure and even confusing. But as we turn out eyes on the Lord, we can clearly see the faithfulness of our Lord in our paths of life. Our faithful Lord will strengthen us on the inside, and he will protect us on the outside from all harms and dangers.

Then in verse 4 Paul says, “We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.” There are many who have confidence in the flesh, their achievements and seemingly favourable human conditions. Yet, we can have confidence in our faithful Lord, With that confidence we can pray for God’s flock of sheep and our children to obey the words of God and live in his blessing.

Then in verse 5, “May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.” Here, the word ‘direct’ is in Greek the same with the word ‘clear’ used in 1 Thessalonians 3:11, “Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.” Its meaning is about removing all the obstacles and hindrances out of the way and opening up a path. So the prayer can be, “May the Lord open up a path in your hearts so that God’s love and Christ’s perseverance be deepened in them. What a wonderful prayer! The love of God can be the whole theme of the Bible. God’s love is that from the beginning he chose us to be saved (2 Thess. 2:13). John expressed God’s love this way in 1 John 8-10, “…God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” All parents want their children to go to good schools and have good friends. They want their sons to meet good wives and their daughters to meet good husbands. But God sent his Son into this hostile broken world to be treated in the worst way so that we might live through him who became an atoning sacrifice for our sins. For this love of God Christ endured and persevered the cross, bearing the pain and shame and all the agonies for the joy and glory set before him and for all of his people. May we all grow in God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.

Thank God that our Lord is faithful and we can have confidence in the Lord, not anything or anyone else and our faithful and trustworthy Lord will lead us into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.

**Second, responsible to work (6-15).** Now Paul says in verse 6, “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.” Here “idle” is in Greek *ataktos* meaning, “out of order”, “our of place.” So it is in other translations “unruly”, “disorderly”, “undisciplined.” Paul continues in verses 7-10, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’” In these verses, we see the words “example” and “model.” We know that Paul’s whole life was an example of following Christ Jesus. Particularly here, he talks about the example of labouring and toiling, not being idle.

Paul continue to say in verses 11-15, “We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” In this instruction and strong warning, Paul wanted to correct those who did not work without sound faith in Christ’s returning. Probably they had a negative attitude toward work, trying to avoid working, if possible. Here we need a right concept of work. God made man in his image and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15). God did not make man to just lounge around taking it easy. Work is blessing and an essential part for man’s happiness. In the Ten Commandments God said, “Six days you shall labour and do all your work.” (Ex. 20:9) We can say that without work, there is no rest. Work is from God. Work is holy. Jesus said in John 5:17, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” How can we imagine the enormous work of God, the work of creation, destruction and restoration, redemption, sustaining of all things, and uncreation and new creation, from Genesis to Revelation. And Jesus also said in John 9:4, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” While we are alive, we are to work according God’s purpose for us, following his leading. It should be clear that we work for the Lord, not for ourselves. When we work for ourselves and for money, we can become workaholics, which is another wrong accept of work. Paul said in Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” This is the Christian work ethics.

In Jesus’ parable of the talents, a master gave five talents to one servant, two talents to another, and one talent to another, and then went on a journey. Upon his return, the first two worked hard and made 100% profit. But the one who received one talent did not work but put it in the ground. The master rebuked him, saying, “You wicked, lazy servant!” (Mt. 25:26). To Jesus, laziness was wickedness. Proverbs 10:4 says, “Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.” 20:4 says, “Sluggards do not plow in season; so at harvest time they look but find nothing.” 21:25 says, “The craving of a sluggard will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work.” In 24:30-31 it says, “I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense.” And 26:14 says, “As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.’ May we have a right attitude toward work so that we may not be a burden to others, but a blessing. It is useful to note what Paul said in Acts 20:35, “…the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

**Third, the Lord of peace (16-18).** Verse 16 says, “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.” “The Lord of peace” – what a description uniquely written in the Scripture described here. The Lord is the Lord of peace who offered himself as a peace offering as Paul says in Colossians 1:20-22, “…through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heave, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds…But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death…” This is a costly peace. And this peace is a problem-free, external peace, but internal peace regardless our outward circumstances. Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Peace comes from the Lord of peace. He can give us peace in this troublesome world, and particularly in our own troublesome station.

And verse 17 says, “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.” In this way, Paul makes all his letters authentic, knowing that he is the agent of God’s truth. He does not want the Thessalonians to be confused about what is really his writing.

Paul ends this epistle with verse 18, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” His final greeting is to all the Thessalonians including to those whom he gave the warning not to be idle and disruptive.

We thank God that our Lord is faithful Lord and we can have confidence in our faithful Lord, praying for God’s flock of sheep and working with responsibility to be a blessing to others, not a burden. Our faithful Lord can strengthen us and protect us from the evil one and all harms and lead us to fulfill his purpose, as we wait for his coming.