

Final Greetings

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Ephesians 6, 21-24 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything.

I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts. Peace be to the brothers and love with faith.

From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may take your seats. Never trust an elf.

[1 : 09] The words exploded out of the dwarf's mouth as he thought about the horrible possibility of joining forces with an elf.

His whole life, dwarves never had anything to do with elves except when they needed to fight each other. But to fight with an elf, that was unthinkable.

In the world of tokens, lord of the rings, elves and dwarves were bred to distrust each other because of ancient conflicts. But the fellowship of the ring is a fellow of the ring.

But the fellowship of the ring is a profound story of how strangers and even historic enemies were drawn together and transformed into a loyal brotherhood by a singular high calling.

To destroy the one ring. To destroy the one ring and defeat evil. Some hobbits, a dwarf, an elf, a man, and a wizard suddenly found that they must go on this mission together.

[2 : 20] They were radically diverse and they came with their own cultures and preferences and prejudices against one another. They began working together, but mainly with suspicion and pride.

However, trust eventually formed through the tests of time and trials as they labored on toward their common mission. And in the movie The Two Towers, the dwarf found himself in a situation he could have never predicted.

Fighting for the same cause as an elf. With weapons out, the dwarf suddenly exclaimed, Never thought I'd die fighting side by side with an elf.

And the elf replied, What about side by side with a friend? And with a smirk on his face and an earnest last look, the dwarf said, I, I could do that.

Each person here comes with a set of culture, preferences, and prejudices.

[3 : 38] Trinity Grace Church as an institution has only been around for almost seven years. So even the oldest connections are relatively new in this room.

We've been brought together with strangers. And the temptation, especially as more strangers make their way in, is to draw lines.

To segregate based on shared preferences and past experiences. I mean, it's just normal. We gravitate toward those that we are most like.

Whether it's parenting priorities or schooling options or politics, marital status, hobbies, season of life. We can easily live in such a way where these cultures, preferences, and even prejudices subdivide us into groups that make perfect sense to the world.

But we've been called by God into a most unexpected family in Jesus Christ.

[4 : 46] We've been called to rally around a cause so much greater than our cultures and preferences and prejudices. We who were once strangers or even enemies have been brought together in a new family through the good news of Jesus Christ.

And he's given us a new mission to live for. It's so much bigger than ourselves. It's a mission that radically reshapes our priorities. It demands our unity.

And it requires dependence on the provisions promised by our Lord Jesus Christ. So I believe that the main point of our text this morning is to live on mission as a new family in Christ through the gospel peace and grace he provides.

I'm going to break this into three sections according to our text. Gospel mission shapes gospel family. Gospel peace unites gospel family.

Gospel grace sustains gospel family. So let's take a look at the first. Gospel mission shapes gospel family. Verses 21 and 22. We've been in the letter to the Ephesians for nearly 30 weeks.

[5 : 57] 30 weeks. And it's not until now, at the very end, that we run into a personal name. Tychicus.

Verse 21. So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. Everything. So Paul is away.

And he wants to send word. So he sends Tychicus with the letter. This letter. This letter right here. So where was Paul? What was he doing at this time?

If you look at the verses immediately before our text, you see in verses 19 and 20 that Paul is in prison. He says he's in chains for preaching the gospel.

So Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesian church from prison. The church in Ephesus was established by Paul several years before this on his third missionary journey to plant churches.

[7 : 04] He stayed there for about two to three years to help the new believers get grounded in the faith. And eventually, Paul is imprisoned in Rome for preaching.

This was his first imprisonment. There were more to come. So we see at the end of the book of Acts. I mean, can you imagine? Paul is their spiritual father.

The people of Ephesus heard Paul preach about the hope found in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. Pagan Gentiles in Ephesus left their polytheism behind to follow the Jesus that Paul preached.

They turned from the very culture and customs that animated all of their family, all of their friends, all of their lives. And what's more, they joined together with the Jewish minority that Paul persuaded in the synagogue.

They also had to turn from their former way of life as this tight-knit Jewish subculture in Ephesus in order to follow the Messiah that Paul preached.

[8 : 15] So both Jew and Gentile were brought together as one new group under the banner of Jesus Christ. So to join this group was not like a really good business move for them.

To join this group was a costly exchange. It was more than just a group. It was a family. And we know this from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, that he gave more than a doctrinal download to people.

He gave of himself in relationship. 1 Thessalonians says, So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves.

Because you have become very dear to us. The gospel shaped a new family of God in Ephesus.

Paul even uses family language in our text to refer to God as the father and Tychicus as his brother. Paul lived with them. He ate with them.

[9 : 30] He laughed with them. He cried with them. He taught them about following Jesus for a couple of years. Paul wanted to let the Ephesians know how he was and what he was doing.

Because a precious family relationship was shaped by the gospel. Their hearts had been knit together with his.

Do you count the believers around you in this room to be precious brothers and sisters? You glance around.

Does your heart warm up at the thought of the faces that you see? Do you long to know how they are and what they are doing? If a member of Trinity Grace Church had to move away, would there be tears in your eyes?

Would there be a longing to hear from them? I mean, if it's easy to imagine a painless departure with any member, not just the ones you're like, but any member, I'd question whether you're understanding the precious blood-bought realities regarding the people sitting all around you.

[10 : 52] These are the kinds of relationships that the gospel shapes. They're precious. This is one of the reasons that we have community groups at our church.

We want to cultivate deeper relationships based on the gospel. I want to urge you to lean into one of these community groups, not just in mere attendance, but relationally investing, even beyond the

meeting, to be friends with people, to text them, to encourage them, to pray with one another. Christ brought us from different places so that we might live for his purposes here in Athens, Tennessee. It's the mission that shaped this family that's in this room.

And it's a shocking reality. It's amazing. In fact, it's even more shocking than that. Paul sent a man named Tychicus. He appears in several scriptures along with many other co-laborers with Paul. Acts 20 verse 4 mentions him as a native of the province of Asia, which is modern-day Turkey. He may have actually been from Ephesus. He was with Paul in Greece and they journeyed with him to another place called Troas at the end of Paul's third missionary journey.

[12 : 08] And according to 2 Timothy, Paul sent him to Ephesus. And at one point, he even planned to possibly send him to the island of Crete to take Titus' place there. So he seems to be a really close companion to Paul at the end of his ministry and was probably well known by the recipients of this very letter.

He's described here as a beloved brother and a faithful minister. I mean, beloved brother just communicates that he's more than a simple co-worker.

Paul resounds with love for this man. Tychicus has a proven track record of ministry in the cause of Christ to keep moving the mission forward. But this title, beloved brother, is also connected with that title, faithful minister.

Minister is also translated sometimes in our Bible as servant. Tychicus was one of those follow-through loyal servants. One of those guys that works behind the scenes to forward the mission.

He's never referenced as a pastor or as an apostle. And yet, he's seen throughout the New Testament as one of the many who labored for the cause of Christ to advance the mission with the gifts that God gave him.

[13 : 30] The church at Ephesus was not Paul's church. Paul was involved in the preaching and the gathering and the initial teaching.

However, Ephesus and the towns, other ones like it, they all benefited benefited from the faithful efforts of a diverse brotherhood. Unseen. It is Christ's church from start to finish.

But as you've seen, he uses this mosaic of ministry and sacrifice to make it happen. So, I think we can say confidently that Trinity Grace Church is not Walt Alexander's church.

But we praise God. We praise God for Walt for his role to preach, to gather, and to teach Christ's church. And there are so many stories of faithful ministers here.

Many of you. sacrificing behind the scenes to help. Help us to grow, to flourish as a people set apart for God.

[14 : 46] I can't help but think of our deacons. In one way or another, they are responsible for the chairs that you're sitting on, the screen that you're reading from, the audio that you're hearing right now, the teams that are serving, in so many more ways.

That's just Sunday. They often don't have a microphone, but their example speaks loudly. These are godly men laying their lives down for the mission. And we're so grateful.

We're so grateful for faithful ministers, servants on mission to shape the gospel family. The last thing I want to draw all your attention to in verse 22 is the very purpose Paul sent Tychicus.

That you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts. This may seem strange to us at first. It did to me.

How is Paul going to encourage their hearts with his update? Their spiritual father is in prison. Isn't that problematic?

[15 : 58] Isn't that bad news? How will the mission go forward if Paul is locked up? And what will happen to the Ephesians and all the other churches?

I mean, they're already battling the temptation to draw back and to go to the comforts of their old lives before it got real complicated with all these strangers around them. Isn't it bad news for their leader to report his imprisonment?

Well, Paul seemed to think the opposite. Imprisonment? Yes. Encouragement? Also, yes.

How could this be? Because the very gospel mission that created this new family in Christ also continued to shape the priorities of their hearts.

Think about it. What you're encouraged by points to what you believe is important. If the Ephesians believed physical well-being was most important, then Paul's imprisonment would be very discouraging.

[17 : 20] If the Ephesians believed personal autonomy was most important, then Paul's imprisonment would be very discouraging. So what in this situation could the Ephesians possibly find to be encouraging?

There must be a different priority. There has to be. Look at what Paul's personal prayer request is in verses 19 and 20. This is what he prays for. His priorities.

Pray also for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare boldly as I ought to speak.

Paul's main priority is not release from prison but faithfulness through prison. He's in prison for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And now that he is in prison you know what his ambition is? To proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do you see the mission is still going forward.

[18 : 29] Paul is living out the anthem of his life he wrote to the Philippians. Philippians 1 for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. So the way that Paul sees it all he can do is win.

That's all he can do is win. If he's alive he will live for Jesus Christ and preach the gospel and plant churches. If he's imprisoned he will live for Jesus Christ and preach the gospel to those in court.

And while he waits in prison he'll write letters. He'll write lots of letters of encouragement to all the churches he already planted. And by golly if he dies he gains Christ.

He wins. He wins no matter what. There's a new set of priorities at play. The advance of the mission cannot be quenched. Paul's in prison but it's not an obstacle.

It's an opportunity for Christ to be magnified. Even Nero he thinks even Nero will hear about the king of kings. That's how Paul thinks.

[19 : 44] The Ephesians will be encouraged to hear this because their greatest joy is that the mission is going forward. I imagine Paul sending Tychicus to the church with this letter in his hand and reminding him of this.

Tell him tell him Tychicus please tell him I am alive and about to preach the gospel again. Even though I'm in chains I'm still free.

I'm still forgiven. I'm still transformed. I'm still hoping. Tell him Tychicus I'm still fighting. I'm still running. I'm still clinging to the Lord.

I'm still striving. I'm still rejoicing. I'm still taking refuge. I'm still building. I'm still proclaiming by God's grace. I'm still encouraging.

Isn't that good news? And they think yes. That actually is a good point Paul. This encouragement does not exist apart from gospel mission.

[20 : 45] If Christ is not Lord then this is lunacy. Crazy. Christ is not Lord then there's no reason for us to be here right now.

It's craziness. We should be broken up into our cultures our preferences and our prejudices. but if Christ is Lord if Christ is Lord I said if Christ is Lord then his mission is unstoppable and there's cause for encouragement here.

It means his transforming grace is still moving forward and making sinners like the Ephesians sinners like us into sons of God the Father.

That's what it means. It means we are brought into a mission bigger than ourselves and there's more to come friends. There's more to come for us here in Athens Tennessee.

[21 : 55] The mission is going forward. Be encouraged Trinity Grace. Gospel mission shapes our gospel family. That's good news. Amen. Second point gospel peace unites gospel family.

The last two verses of our text and of the whole letter move into a benediction which is a pronouncement of God's good over God's people in the form of this final blessing.

Verse 23 begins with peace be to the brothers grace. While verse 24 begins with grace. In many of Paul's epistles grace and peace is the usual order.

In fact at the start of this very letter Paul writes verse 2 grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's how he started. So peace is one of the leading themes throughout the whole letter. And the way Paul uses it peace is closely related to reconciliation.

[23 : 14] Bringing unity where there was once segregation. We saw this most wonderfully in chapter 2 verses 13 to 14 it said but now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ for he himself himself is our peace who has made us both one.

There's the unity and he's broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. The peace Paul has in view reconciles us both to God and to other people.

We were once at war with God and because of that war we were separated from him but it wasn't just a physical separation this was a relational separation.

We were estranged from God. We were in rebellion against God the ruler and going the wrong way. A couple days ago I was driving toward downtown near Food City and there's a two lane road but both lanes are one way.

so I was cruising in the left lane when I saw a little car flying toward me in my lane. Thankfully I was able to get over into the right lane before that car smashed into me and as I looked up in the rear view I could see the driver was shocked and mad at me.

[24 : 58] I'm sure I'm sure of it that the driver did not realize that he was driving against traffic on a one way road. For all he knew he was just carefully driving in his right lane my left while fools like me kept drifting into his lane.

I watched in my rear view as several more vehicles swerved out of the way and the car just continued to fly down the one way into oncoming traffic.

All of us were going the wrong direction in our lives. All of us. Isaiah 53 says that we have all gone astray everyone to their own way.

We've turned against the ruler and insisted on our own way. All of us. The result is that we are separated from God and from one another.

We spent our days think of it. We spent our days crashing into each other and then shaking our fists at everyone around us. You're the problem.

[26 : 11] You're the problem. You're the problem. That's what we did. That's how we lived. And the culture around us it insists that the problem is that others are not allowing us to go the direction we feel is right.

That's the problem. But the reality is that we've ignored the signs of the ruler and then we've gotten angry at everyone and everything around us.

The truth is that we are to blame. We are to blame. blame. not someone else. We are to blame.

We must submit to the ruler and turn around. That's what we must do. Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life.

No one comes to the father but through me. So this is what Jesus does. Jesus is like a bus that stops us on the road to destruction.

[27 : 29] That's what he does. Right in front of us. Stop. He opens our eyes to see that we're going the wrong way and then he opens the door and says get in.

He said okay. We find our seat in him with all sorts of other people on this bus. And it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, if you're beautiful or ugly, young or old, black, blue, green or purple, male or female, early or late, it doesn't matter.

Jesus carries us all as a family and guess what? He takes us all the way to the father. That's what he does.

Jesus came to reconcile us. He came to reconnect us to God the father. He lived in perfect obedience, being perfectly righteous before God, the ruler.

And then he died on the cross to satisfy God's just right wrath against our sin, against our rebellion. Why?

[28 : 40] So that all, all, all who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus Christ's sufficient sacrifice can be forgiven of their sin.

He says get in. You're welcome. Get in. All who trust in Christ are united with Christ. We are united with him. That's how he can be our peace.

If you're not a Christian, I want to invite you, get in. Jesus Christ flings open the doors and says, get in.

Stop going your own way. Get in. Trust me. I'll take you all the way to the Father. He's not just our peace with God. He gives us peace with one another too.

If we are in the bus, then the most important thing that any of us have in common is that we all used to insist on going our own direction away from God, and now we're on the bus.

[29 : 45] Can you believe it? I was thinking about it this morning. I was like, I was telling a friend, I can't believe I get to preach. I never would have thought that.

I was breaking everything, going the opposite direction away from God. And he said, get on the bus. It's baffling.

It's amazing. It's amazing, grace. That's the most important thing about us. That's the thing we have in common. We're on the bus, we're headed toward the father together.

So it really does not make sense. If you think about it this way, it does not make sense to start subdividing and segregating on the bus. We should just be amazed that he stopped us and brought us in.

We are united in Christ as brothers and we have peace with God. So if you are fighting, if you are ignoring, if you are dividing against anyone in his church on the bus, you're acting more like a sinner in rebellion rather than a saint at peace with God and his people through Jesus Christ.

[31 : 08] I want to call you to embrace the peace that he's purchased with everyone on the bus. Everyone in this local church. Be refreshed by this benediction of peace.

Marvel at God's kindness towards you in Christ and then make peace, make peace, make peace with fellow travelers that Christ has brought in.

You'll see that the benediction in verse 23 also includes love with faith. Peace and love with faith have their divine origin and they flow from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace and love go together flowing from the Father through you to others. That's how it works. Ephesians 4 if you remember it said we bear with one another in love eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

Daniel prayed it this morning. Bear one another in love. Love for one another is an overflow of the peace that Christ brings.

[32 : 22] Paul emphasizes love as the premier Christian virtue. He's urging all believers to live it out. Live it out with one another. Live it out in your community groups.

Live it out after the service praying over one another. Live it out taking burdens off of people.

Helping one another. Gospel peace unites gospel family and flows into love for one another.

Point three. Gospel peace gospel grace sustains gospel family. Verse 24 says grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

All 13 letters of Paul. begin with grace to and end with grace be with.

Here he puts a qualification. Grace be with all who love our Lord. So is God's grace only for those who prove it by loving him?

[33 : 38] God's love for God's love for Christ? Is this verse teaching us that grace is conditional on our love for Christ?

Is that what it's saying? I would argue it would be a mistake to assume that. Especially in light of the rest of the book. It would contradict what's already been established in chapters 1 and chapter 2.

If you remember chapter 1, right out of the gate, Paul says God chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

And then it says, in love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace.

There's the grace. What praises his glorious grace is connected with this choosing us before the foundation of the world. In love.

[34 : 44] In love. He predestined us. So what we hear here is his loving came before our loving. His loving came before our loving.

The glory of God's grace is that it comes before and creates what we are as Christians. So our love does not merit his grace.

His grace is totally undeserved. It is the gift of God. So then how should we understand the blessing of grace for all those who love the Lord.

I recently saw a video of Youth Baseball World Series. The tensions were super high as the two teams went back and forth.

Then at one point the pitcher threw a bad ball. I don't know if it was on purpose or not, but it ended up hitting the batter right in the side of the head and the batter just goes down right over the plate.

[35 : 50] The umpire, coach, the trainer, they all come out to this kid that's on the ground in an instant and in complete silence for several seconds, everyone waited to see if the worst had come true.

Did the headshot kill the boy? Everybody's waiting. horrified, silent. Finally, the boy sits up.

Eventually, he's able to stand up to the sound of just enormous relief and applause from everybody. And he began to walk. He made his way to first base to take his base.

But the pitcher had not recovered from the shock. He stood over the mound, paralyzed, over the thought, I nearly killed him.

He was so shaken. He couldn't even move on. And then something even more unexpected happened. The boy who had received the headshot left first base and he jogs over to the stunned pitcher and just embraced him.

[37 : 19] These are middle school boys. And the pitcher, upon receiving this embrace, he begins to just heave, sobs, as he received this very tangible sign of forgiveness from the very one who should have been his enemy.

And as that boy embraced the pitcher, it was as if he was saying, I am alive. I forgive you. I'm with you.

And my friends, in a much greater way, the one that we have wounded is with us. Jesus Christ took the blow of our sin at the cross, but he rose again.

And not only that, he came to us. He came to us. The one that should have been our enemy came to give us grace.

Grace. Like the boy on the mound, we received Christ's grace and forgiveness. Our hearts respond to that kind of grace with love.

[38 : 41] That's what it does. We receive grace and it responds with love. And now, my friends, the game is over. The game is over. Christ is no longer against us.

It's as if he is with us saying to us, to me and to you, I'm alive. I'm alive. I forgive you. I'm with you. We're no longer enemies. We are friends. Friends. So this grace that we see right here is not initial saving grace.

This, we could add the parentheses before it. This is more grace. More grace. He has more grace in store for us. More good to encourage us with.

More undeserved gifts to give us. The grace that saved us is also the grace that sustains us to the very end. That's what's happening. The letter to the Ephesians began with grace and grace will have the last word.

[39 : 47] Because of the grace of God, we are redeemed. We are God's possession. We have been brought from death to life. We've been citizens of a better country.

We're members of the household of God. We've been made into one new man in Jesus Christ. We've been united into one body with Christ as our head.

We no longer work for ourselves but for Christ. We are no longer ruled by anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, envy, jealousy.

Instead, grace sets us free. It sets us free to build others up, to think of others more highly than ourselves. Through love and through our words, grace gives us the power to walk as children of light, to live in upright relationship with God and with one another.

Grace transforms marriages to display the beauty of Christ's relationship to the church. Grace guides parents and children into fruitful and wise living.

[40 : 50] Grace brings us into the battle with the weapons we need to stand in the power of Christ's strength. It's grace from first to last. Grace from first to last.

The fellowship of the ring begins as a group of strangers, suspicious, proud, diverse, but then it ends as a band of brothers willing to die for each other and their shared mission together.

At one of the key moments, each one came forward to offer their contribution for the mission. You have my sword. You have my bow.

You have my axe. Trinity Grace, we have been called by God into a most unexpected family right here in Jesus Christ.

Why? It's to rally around a cause so much greater than our cultures, our preferences, our prejudices. We who are once strangers and even enemies have been brought together in a new family through the good news of Jesus Christ.

[42 : 09] And he's given us a new mission to live for so much bigger than ourselves. It's a mission that radically reshapes our priorities, it demands our unity, it requires dependence on the provisions promised by our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's live on mission. Let's live on mission as a new family in Christ through the gospel, the peace and grace that he provides. May God help us.

Let's pray. Lord, we do cling to you. It is all of grace, not by works, that we can stand righteous before you.

Thank you for saving us. Thank you for screeching the bus in front of us and bringing it to a halt when we were running away from you while we were still your enemies.

Christ died for us. Thank you for making us right with you and giving us more grace. We cling to you in the coming days. grace. Let us walk forward in the strength of your might.

[43 : 10] Pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

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