

Third Sunday of End Time *Saints Triumphant* – November 17, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14) He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15) **So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you**, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 16) May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17) encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2) And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3) But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4) We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. 5) **May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.**

Dear friends in Christ:

Please Wait

I hate waiting. Waiting tests my patience. But waiting isn't quite so bad if I've got something else to do while I wait. But what can you do when you are standing in a line? I don't like standing in line. Our text was written to the Thessalonians – to a people who were waiting for the Lord to return. In fact in their impatience some of them had begun to wonder if the day of the Lord had already come. Some false rumors seemed to fuel this belief for those Thessalonians. In our text for today Paul assures them that they had not missed the day of the Lord and he offers them words of encouragement which give them advice as to what they can do while they wait for the Lord's return.

The fact of the matter is that we're still waiting, perhaps somewhat unhappily, perhaps somewhat anxiously, perhaps wondering how much longer it will be. We're still waiting for the day of the Lord to come. Paul's words of encouragement from our text give us some things to do while we wait. While you wait give thanks. While you wait stand firm. While you wait pray. While you wait put your confidence in the Lord.

Because the Thessalonians appeared to have been a bit confused about the time of the Lord's return Paul wrote these words to them: (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3) **Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2) not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3) Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.**

Paul mentioned two events that would occur before the coming of the day of the Lord. 1) the occurrence of the rebellion – a turning away from the truth of salvation and 2) the revelation of the man of lawlessness – more commonly known to Christians as the anti-Christ who would lead people away from Christ with his deceptions and false teachings. Since those two events had not occurred the Thessalonians could be assured that they Day of the Lord had not occurred either.

Church history together with an examination of Scripture reveals to us that the false and deceptive teachings of the Papacy are the fulfillment of these two events. Although these events have now taken place we

are still waiting for the Day of the Lord to come – the day when we will be rescued from the evil times of this present age. Until that day comes we can follow the example of Paul and give thanks while we wait.

When Paul thought about all that could have happened to lead the Thessalonians away from the truth he felt compelled to thank the Lord for all he had done for them. **But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14) He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

It's quite easy for us to find lots of reasons to complain, isn't it? And it's quite easy for us to take our faith for granted isn't it? Paul addresses both of those temptations in our text as he reminds us that he was giving thanks for what the Lord had done for the Thessalonians. Although Paul was the one who has shared the Gospel with the Thessalonians it was the Lord who had used that Gospel to call the Thessalonians to faith and salvation in keeping with God's eternal plan for them.

Like the Thessalonians we have been saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. We have not been lead astray by the deceptive teachings of the man of lawlessness. And this is not because of anything we have done. It is because of what God has done for us. God has chosen us to be his own. God has sent his son to provide salvation for us. He has called us to faith through the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He provides us with his messengers – faithful pastors and teachers as well as Christian parents and families who share the Gospel with us. As we call of this to mind we will feel an obligation – the same obligation that Paul felt – to thank God for his blessings while we wait for the day of the Lord to come and for our opportunity to share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven.

For now we're still waiting for the Day of the Lord to come. And while we wait we are encouraged by our text to Stand Firm. **So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 16) May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17) encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.**

In the earlier chapters of this letter Paul had spoken of false teachings and teachers which would come and lead people away from the truth prior to the arrival of the Day of the Lord. It's no wonder that Paul now gives the encouragement to stand firm and to hold on to the teachings that had been passed on to them.

Paul had the privilege of both speaking to the Thessalonians in person and instructing them in the letters he wrote to them. We have his instructions preserved for us and we realize that he has shared with us the wonderful truths of our salvation. He urges us to stand firm – to get a firm hold on his teachings and to hand on to them firmly – never ever letting go. The inspired teachings of Scripture which Paul was writing about are God's own promises and teachings. No wonder he urges us to keep clinging to them tightly. They will never fail us. They will keep us from being deceived as we wait for the Lord's return.

Where does the power to stand firm and hold on to the teachings of Scripture come from. Surely it is not from our own strength – it is the Lord himself who loved us and by his grace has given us encouragement and hope in his word who will continue to encourage us and strengthen us to hold fast to his teachings. The Lord's love for us and his grace for us compels and empowers us to hold on to his truths.

Standing firm in the faith is not a passive activity. It includes more than holding on to the truths of Scripture. It means preserving them in our actions and words and living and teaching according to them.

Our old Adam will try to live for ourselves, to follow deceptive teachings, to abandon the truths of Scripture, to let go of the Lord's will for our lives. But the Lord through his word will strengthen us to resist the temptations of the old Adam. We will encounter challenging and discouraging situations but the Lord himself will encourage us by reminding us of his love for us and his grace to us. With his encouragement we will be able to endure the troubles of this life with the confidence that everything will turn out for the good of those who have been called by God according to his purpose. We have a hope for the future that is based on his sure promises – promises fulfilled by Christ who has defeated sin and Satan for us, who has been raised from the dead to assure us of our own resurrection and who has returned in glory to heaven to assure us of our glorious home in heaven.

Paul has encouraged us stand firm and to hold on the truths of Scripture by living according to them while we wait for the day of the Lord. The use of Scripture and prayer go hand in hand and so Paul also encourages us to pray while we wait. **Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2) And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.**

Paul's prayer requests reflect the Lord's prayer in which Jesus taught us to pray hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, and deliver us from evil.

When we pray hallowed by your name – we're asking that God would keep his name holy among us as we honor it by living holy lives according to his word and by teaching that word in its truth and purity to others. That is what Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to do. And you and I have that same opportunity – we can pray that the Lord would bless the work of the missionaries who have been sent in our name so that the word of the Lord may spread quickly and be honored as we have honored it with an active faith.

When we pray for the Lord's blessings on the work of those who share the Gospel – we're really praying: thy kingdom come. We're praying that God will lead us and others to believe his word and live a holy life in keeping with it. But not everyone believes or as Paul reminds us in our text not everyone has faith. Just as there were wicked and evil men who opposed the Apostle Paul – so there are those who will oppose us and the missionaries we send as we seek to share the gospel with others. And so we will also pray: deliver us from evil. Keep us and all Christians safe from anyone or anything that will harm us in any way while we wait for the Lord to come.

Such prayers will reflect the confidence that we have in the Lord. And such confidence is not misplaced as our text assures us: **But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4) We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. 5) May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.**

Put your confidence in the Lord as you wait. The Lord will be faithful – he will strengthen us so we can hold firmly to his truths in word and deed. He will encourage us to bring our prayers to him. He will lead us to give him thanks as we wait for him. He will protect and deliver us from the evil one and his temptations. We can count on the Lord to direct our hearts straight toward God's love and the perseverance of Christ who (Hebrews 12:2) **who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

So that we might share in Christ's glory, that we might continue to believe the truth, that we might hold firm to God's word, that we might speak and do what is pleasing to God and that we might continue to turn to the Lord in prayer Paul prayed: **May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.**

God's love is made known to us through the Gospel. If our hearts are centered on that love, then any false teaching that might come along, threatening to rob us of the love of God will not lead us astray. If we fix our eyes on Jesus and his example of perseverance in the midst of suffering, we will receive encouragement to persevere when trouble comes on us while we wait for the day of the Lord.

Yes, we're still waiting for the Day of the Lord – while we're waiting the Lord will be with us with his love, his encouragement and his protection. And while we wait there's plenty to do.

1. Give thanks while you wait
2. Stand Firm while you wait
3. Pray while you wait
4. Put your confidence in the Lord while you wait

Amen.