

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

¹³ But we are always obligated to thank God for you, brothers, loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation by the sanctifying work of the Spirit and faith in the truth. ¹⁴ For this reason he also called you through our gospel so that you would obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold on to the teachings that were passed along to you, either by word of mouth or by a letter from us. ¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and establish you in every good work and word. Chapter 3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us so that the word of the Lord may spread quickly and be glorified just as it was among you. ² Pray also that we may be rescued from evil and wicked people. For not everyone has faith. ³ Still, the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and protect you from the Evil One. ⁴ We also have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we are telling you. ⁵ May the Lord continue to direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's patient endurance.

Sermon for Third Sunday of End Time—Saints Triumphant, Nov 15, 2020 St. Paul's Green Garden, MI

Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Theme: "Victorious Saints Are Praying Saints"

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

The final buzzer sounds, the game is over, the victory is in the record books. After the locker-room celebration the winning team emerges with smiles, the aches and pains only a minor annoyance right now. The stars of the game are asked to face the questions of the print and broadcast media. Post-game press conferences are almost as standard as free throws after a foul or an extra point after a touchdown. The media wants the winning team to communicate. They want to know how the big play happened and what the coach was thinking when he called the game-winning play.

Few of us find it difficult to talk about a victory when the game is complete, or when we finished sewing that special quilt or even when we have found a great bargain while Christmas shopping. Victories, triumphs, successes often cause us to talk a great deal, sometimes whether someone wants to hear about it or not. But even if you aren't a sports fan, or if you don't do quilting or stamping or bowling, you and I still have a stake in a great victory. It is a victory that we need to talk about because others need to hear about it. You see, they, too, have a stake in the victory that Jesus won by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. We are saints, those whom Jesus has made holy by his blood.

Page 2

But there are not press conferences. The world at large doesn't want to hear about this victory because as Jesus reminds us the world hates him. So our witness is usually one to one. And though our Lord Jesus won the victory, he knows that though we are victorious saints who share his triumph, we still fight the good fight of faith in this world. He also knows we need his strength, his help and his love. So even though there are no press conferences, our Lord still wants us to communicate with him. He wants us to pray. This was Paul's message to the Thessalonian Christians who were struggling against enemies who spewed false teaching and persecuted them. Paul told them that it would get worse. But he reminded them that victorious saints are praying saints.

The first prayer that Paul urges believers to pray is a prayer of thanks. The Lord has preserved the faith of his people all over the world despite Satan's raging and the persecution of enemies. So Paul is urging us to pray also.

The apostle had just told the Thessalonians that enemies of the gospel, including the Antichrist, are going to exert more and more influence in the world. Yet it is obvious to Paul that the work of the Holy Spirit is powerful. He says, "**God chose you from the beginning for salvation by the sanctifying work of the Spirit and faith in the truth.**" It is this for which Paul gives thanks to God. The Holy spirit chose the Thessalonians from eternity to be believers. This is one of the most amazing teachings of scripture, but it is true. God tells us that he has chosen us before the world was ever created. Neither we, nor the Thessalonians, nor Paul, nor any other believer ever did anything to be chosen by God. He did not choose us because he thought there would be anything good in us. God's choosing you did not and does not depend on you or me. God did it because he wants you to know that Christ's victory for you is in the record books and neither Satan, nor the world can change that fact. Our faith and our salvation are safe because of God's mighty power. He predestined us to believe in him. Give thanks to God for this act of his mercy to you.

Since the Spirit has begun his good work in you, keep praying in these last days. Pray that the Holy Spirit will keep strengthening your faith by the power of his word and sacraments. Even when you realize that you have neglected prayer, ask your Lord to forgive you for Jesus' sake and then plead earnestly that God would continue to shower his forgiveness down on you. And always remember how precious God's forgiveness is to you. Remember how the enemies of your faith are working overtime to rob you of your faith. Remember that God chose you from eternity and keep praying that the Lord will preserve your faith in him and bring you to the place he has prepared for you at his side. Then you will see with your own eyes that Jesus' victory is complete.

And Paul reminds us to remember how precious is the faith of our loved one. While he encouraged them he also asked God: "**So then, brothers, stand firm and**

hold onto the teachings that were passed along to you, either by word of mouth or by a letter from us.” It is so easy to ask God to keep our parents, children, brothers and sisters, and grandparents safe from earthly evil. And God wants us to pray for their earthly safety. But what if God chose to take one of your loved ones from you, suddenly, without warning, and because of the pandemic? You and I also want to pray that your gracious God would preserve our loved ones’ faith in him so even if some kind of tragic event might overtake them, their death would not be a tragedy but only a stepping stone to eternal life.

Our Lord has told us that the world is not our permanent home. On God’s great Day of Judgment we and all our believing loved ones will gather together for an eternal family reunion with every believer who has ever lived. Yes, friends, pray. Thank God for giving you faith. Thank God for choosing you for eternity. Ask the Holy Spirit to continue his work in your heart and in the hearts of all our fellow Christians worldwide. Pray that he will move them to love his word and treasure his sacraments so that they always remain in and grow in faith. You see, when you pray that God would preserve and protect people’s faith you are praying for the work of the gospel, “Thy kingdom come.”

While Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to pray he was also very aware of their situation. “I know how you believers in Thessalonica have been showing your Christian faith. I know what you have been going through. Ever since you heard about the gospel message it rang out from you like a trumpet all over Macedonia. You shared your faith. And I know that this was a bodily risk for you. Remember that I had to run for my life after doing mission work in your city for only three weeks. You also know that the enemies of the gospel followed me to the next town and tried to make trouble for me there. But God will not let his gospel die. After all look what he did in you. He gave you courage in the face of vicious persecution to share the gospel message with other Macedonians. Isn’t this God’s power to spread his gospel and give you encouragement and hope for eternal life so that you share the gospel with others? I will keep praying for you that the Lord will keep encouraging you through his Word, and that he will increase your hope in his promises.”

Friends, don’t we each need encouragement from God? We each have our own trials and challenges in life. It might be health challenges, it might be the person of family we have been witnessing to about Jesus. We may be trying to talk with a fellow member who needs to be hearing God’s Word here in his house. Or perhaps we have other personal challenges. Let your fellow Christians know about these things in your life and ask them to pray for you. And when others share their challenges with you encourage them from God’s word and let them know that you will be praying for them. When you do this you are continuing the spread of God’s Word among your fellow Christians. They in turn will be encouraged to share it with others and the Lord

is honored because people are witnessing about their faith. And the word of the Lord grows.

Again, when you pray the Lord's Prayer, remember the meaning of the first and second petitions. When you pray, "Hallowed be thy name" you are asking God to help you keep his name holy by believing his word and living obediently to all his commands. When we do this we honor God and all his word. And remember how precious the second petition is, for when we pray, "Thy kingdom come" we are praying directly for the spread of the gospel all over the world. We are praying that God would graciously rule in people's hearts through his Word. When the word spreads, when people believe the good news, God's name gets the honor and glory. So always keep the meaning of the Lord's Prayer in mind as often as you pray it. And then, in your own prayers, repeat the meaning of its petitions in your own words.

It would be good for each of us to review our catechisms often so that we remember what a treasure we have. When you do, you will find yourself very well equipped to encourage others with the word and you will know what to pray for each day as you come before your Lord with your requests and petitions. Remember Paul's simple words here: "**Finally, brothers, pray for us so that the word of the Lord may spread quickly and be glorified just as it was among you.** Jesus won the victory and you and I live in this victory. Jesus said in his parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin that there is rejoicing in heaven among the angels when even one sinner repents and comes to faith. Why? They rejoice because another soul is saved and God's name is glorified.

God's name is glorified when you pray for the gospel. We know this world is coming to an end. The time is short. People's souls are in peril. The wickedness of the devil and the world are everywhere trying to stop the spread of the gospel. Paul specifically asked for the Thessalonians' prayers for protection from the forces of evil as he also prayed for the Thessalonians.

You've already heard how Paul was persecuted in Thessalonica. He wrote this second letter to these Christians, while in the city of Corinth. He could see that the city was full of all kinds of wickedness and many people would be opposed to the gospel. This didn't surprise him. He knew Jesus said, "**If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.**" But though Paul faced this trouble in Corinth God had encouraged Paul to preach the gospel boldly. One night in a vision the Lord told Paul, "**Do not be afraid; keep on speaking do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.**"

Paul asked for the Thessalonians' prayers not because he didn't trust God but because he knew God would answer their prayers and so confirm his promises to Paul. He is really showing his confidence in God when he asks them to pray.

Page 5

Once again, remember the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. We pray, "Deliver us from evil." This could easily be translated, 'Deliver us from the evil one.' Satan is the greatest backer of evil in the world. He is the number one enemy of Christians. Paul knew that the Thessalonians would pray for him. So he expressed his confidence in God's power to deliver them as well as himself from Satan's schemes. **"Still, the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and protect you from the Evil One."**

You and I probably don't truly understand the peril our foreign missionaries and their families face. While some mission fields are not especially dangerous, many are. You know that Americans are not very well-liked in many places around the world. I am sure many foreigners look on our mission activity as just one more way that our country is trying to exert its influence in the world by "forcing our country's religion on people." Satan uses this attitude and incites evil people to try to do harm to our missionaries. Others simply see our missionaries as very wealthy and often try to steal from them, so their property and lives are often at risk. We often forget that mission work is not glamorous, many times it is dangerous. We also tend to focus on our own problems or we become content when our lives are safe and things are going well. Remember to pray for our missionaries and those whom they serve. They all face physical and spiritual harm. At almost every synod convention when one or more missionaries speak they thank the members of our synod for their prayers and ask for our continued prayers on their behalf, for the spread of the gospel, and their safety.

You see, we are all triumphant saints. The final victory is ours, we just haven't left the battlefield yet. It is said on the day the Armistice was signed that brought WWI to an end, thousands of people still lost their lives in the final battles. Our Savior defeated all of our enemies. They cannot win. This is why they, especially Satan fight so hard. He wants your soul. But friends, keep battling. Use prayer as one of those weapons that you use each day. Let the Word of God and his sacraments strengthen you and then pray. Yes, pray continually as Paul says. Thank God for preserving you and our fellow Christians in faith. Pray that the Holy Spirit would spread the gospel. And ask that God would protect his people both physically and spiritually. And when he finally brings us all home, we will have a victory celebration with greater joy and more blessings than any earthly victory. Amen.