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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 17, 2013
26th Sunday after Pentecost
Saints Triumphant Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 20:27-38
Hymns: 537; 409; 307; 413:5,6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you,

both that you do and will do the things we command you. 5
Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God
and into the patience of Christ. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is
truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, who has gotten us the victory, dear fellow
Redeemed.

INTRO: Sharing in the Victory

People are very good at claiming and celebrating victory, even when it is someone else's. Think of any sports championship and the celebration that ensues. When the Boston Red Socks won the World Series the city exploded in joy and rejoicing. Without doubt many voices were raised calling out "We won! We won!" That's just the way it is. It wouldn't be any different in any other city or with any other sport. However most of the people of Boston had very little or nothing to do with that victory. There were only nine Red Sox players out on the field at any one time. Those players along with others in the dugout, and their coaches and trainers made up the team that won the World Series. Any joy the rest of Boston felt was purely vicarious, but they were all glad to claim a part and share in the joy. But as far as a true benefit over and above a satisfied sports zeal there was little for the people of Boston to treasure. The **players** gained a monetary reward that they keep for themselves. Some would gain an advantage for future contract negotiations. Perhaps one or two saw the dream of being inducted into the Hall of Fame come a step closer. None of that would trickle down to the guy on the street

And so today we are observing a Sunday in which we are focused on --

THEME: Sharing in Christ's Victory.

This is without a doubt a vicarious victory. **Jesus did it all!** **He** lived the perfect sinless life necessary for our salvation. **He** bore our sins to the cross and there suffered and died and endured the curse of God we deserved. **He** rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. **We had nothing** to do with securing the victory. So is it just like it is with sports? Is the benefit we derive from Christ's victory purely emotional, a temporary thrill of victory that lifts our spirits a bit as we live this dreary life? **Not at all!** God ensured that we would share fully in all the benefits of that victory! That is the will of God for you! So as we look to the words of our text we see how this wondrous victory comes to us. Our text reveals --

I. Where the Victory Began.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

The joy and celebration of thanksgiving is there! We give thanks to God along with the Apostle Paul for the victory **that is ours!** It started when God chose us for salvation! It needs to be understood that Paul is not speaking of a general vast choosing of a nation or a specific ethnic group. God chose **you** personally, in Christ, since before the world began. It was not a choice that was based on the merits of your character or your behavior. This choice was made **“through sanctification of the Holy Spirit.”**

Sanctification means a separating out from that which is

common and unclean, and dedicating something for a holy purpose. It is the process of making something clean and acceptable for that purpose. That is how we qualify for God's choosing each and every one of us for this victory of salvation. Paul continues:

2 Thessalonians 3:14 "He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

According to His will for us He called us to faith in Jesus. Faith comes by hearing the gospel. The Spirit works that faith in our hearts as a part of that sanctification that qualified us to share in the glory of Christ. And, **Oh Yea**, that is a real and eternal benefit of being included in the victory celebration that is centered in Christ as our crucified and risen Savior. He won the victory over sin death and the devil. God includes us in the victory, and not only in the celebration, but also in the eternal benefits of that victory! That is the gospel message! In Romans Paul calls this gospel "**the power of God unto salvation**" (Romans 1:16). He calls it this power because the Holy Spirit doesn't work in a vacuum. The Spirit uses this message of Christ crucified as His tool to change hearts, and breathe life into dead souls. This is where the victory began and how it comes to us. As **saints triumphant** it is essential that we comprehend the importance of --

II. Persevering in that Victory.

Unfortunately this is part of the plan that we tend to mess up. While it is God the Holy Spirit that preserves us in true faith, we have a tendency to short circuit the system by taking the gospel for granted, and neglecting the means of grace. As we have already asserted, **the Spirit works through the Word!** So then persevering in the victory

Christ won for us includes staying in the Word. And So Paul encourages in our text:

2 Thessalonians 3:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

“Traditions” shouldn’t be seen as a derogatory word denigrating the truth. **Far from it!** Paul is asserting that they have had the truth and known the truth, and that the gospel is not some new thing that just appeared that they should be skeptical of its power and authority. The truth of the gospel came to them in the preaching of Paul and other servants of the Word, as well as in the **written** Word. This includes not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists. **To persevere in the faith the Christians of Thessalonica needed to stand fast and hold to the teachings of the Bible.** They needed to hear, and read, and study the Word.

And that’s what we need also! Preservation in faith will not come in the absence of the Scripture. When the Word is neglected faith grows weak; the light of faith grows dim, and may finally be extinguished. Hear the Word and know the blessing of the Spirit in preserving you in the truth! Hold fast to the truth of the victory that Christ won for you with His own blood. We need it as we endure the struggles of this life.

2 Thessalonians 3:16-17 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

Taking faith into life doesn't come on our own. We live in a sinful and corrupt world. We know that and recognize that. In spite of that we have our sinful flesh that is influenced by that world, and impacts our values, our morals, our actions. Sin encroaches more than we want to admit, indeed even more than we might realize. So it is that we are dependent upon the powerful working of God in our hearts and lives to keep us living the victory that Christ won for us. Christians dare not look upon the gospel as a license to sin, but rather as a precious pardon, a cleansing fountain. Once we are made clean and have been granted the glory of Christ and the gift of eternal life, we shall not desire to return to the mire of sin that leads to death! Not according to the new man who is created in us according to righteousness and true holiness. It is God that comforts us with the gospel, assuring us of forgiveness for our sins each and every day of our lives. It is God that leads us in the paths of righteousness so that as we walk through this life we walk in the ways of the Lord and live to the glory of His name. Along the way we are -

III. Sharing the Victory in a Hostile World.

Sharing a victory is certainly something that comes naturally to people, **unless** one finds himself in a **hostile** environment. You know the Boston fans celebrated in Boston where everybody loves the Red Sox, not downtown New York City where one is far more likely to find Yankee fans with a great deal of animosity toward the Red Sox. We live in a world that is hostile to Christ, and yet we are not just encouraged to celebrate the victory among ourselves as we do here in church. We are encouraged, even commissioned, to share the victory with others that they also might know the love of Christ and the glory that is found through faith in Him. Paul gives us keys in the

closing verse of our text to successfully bring this victory to others.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-4 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.

Sharing the victory begins with **prayer**. This very thing is included in the Lord's Prayer: "**Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" We are praying in these petitions that the Lord would bless the spread of His Word; that His Word may enter into the hearts of people and enlighten them with true faith. This is the kingdom of God's grace, as God's grace rules in the hearts of believers throughout the world. And the next petition leads right into Paul's thought concerning the evil in this world. Luther taught us that "**God's will is done when He breaks and stops every evil will and plan of those who do not want us to hallow His name, or let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, of the world and of our own sinful flesh**" (Luther's Small Catechism; Third Petition -- Sydow edition).

Paul continues with the assurance that God is faithful. When we are under attack by the forces of evil God will protect our faith from these attacks of the evil one. He will keep us safe. We should not fear what the world might do to us. We should rejoice in our faith, and let all see the victory that we possess in our hearts through faith in Christ Jesus. Then God is glorified before the world, and His kingdom grows.

Conclusion: Christ's Victory directs our hearts into a love for God.

The closing verse of our text is a blessing from Paul and our victorious Savior.

2 Thessalonians 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

This is what being among the **Saints Triumphant** is all about. It is not only celebrating the victory of those who have gone before us into heaven. It is also all about celebrating the victory we possess in our hearts through faith in Christ Jesus. With that victory we are enabled to live in the **patience of Christ**. He endured so much for us, including the rejection of the people whom He came to save. He suffered shame and pain, not only at the hands of His enemies, but at the **hand of God**.

Now if we happen to endure some discomfort, or ridicule, or shame for His name's sake, God grant that we endure it with the patience of Christ, rejoicing that we also have been found worthy to suffer shame for His name. Hey! Many a sports fan will endure ridicule and still own their team! Think how much greater a privilege it is to be identified with our victorious Lord! May all the world know that **we are the Lord's**, and that we share fully in His Victory – to the glory of His name!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.