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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 20, 2015
17th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 17:17-24, Matthew 25:14-30

Hymns: 239; 400; 314; 309

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

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24

14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Why am I here? What's my purpose for living?

These are questions that are often associated with youth searching for the meaning of life. However, this isn't only a question for the

adolescents. It is an important question for people of all ages. It is a question that is not asked often enough by young or old. In fact I have actually been asked this question more often by elderly Christians who fear they have outlived any useful purpose, than I have been by youth who are struggling to understand their purpose in life. All too often the young have been misled to think the world is here to serve them, that the world revolves around them. Young ambitious adults may think the world is their oyster. There is wealth and prestige and success waiting for them, and they are here to take what the world has to offer. Children of God are looking for the answer to the question, "What is God's will for my life?"

Jesus addressed this question in the parable in our gospel lesson this morning. He has given us, His servants, differing gifts and varied abilities that we might use for Him while we await His return. We get a bit confused about life when we are trying to figure exactly which gifts and abilities God has given us, and how we are to make best use of them in our working life. But the Lord has bigger issues in mind about us. His will is clear. That will is clearly laid for us in our text. So then let us consider --

THEME: The Will of God in Christ Jesus for You.

The will of God for you should not and really cannot be considered apart from Christ Jesus. We are connected to Christ Jesus through faith. We understand that He has brought us peace with God. He has made us spiritually alive. He **is** the reason and purpose for our lives. So then, as we consider the will of God for you in Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world, we are immediately impressed with the implications this has for our actions and attitudes --

I. Toward Our Fellow Man .

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

These verses come as the conclusion of a letter to a congregation of gentile Christians. They needed to realize that the will of God for each of them was connected to the will of God for their fellow

believers. The Lord desires that we look out for one another, not only physically but also spiritually.

The tests that come in the life of a Christian may vary greatly from one individual to another, and yes, some may get caught up in an unruly life. The excesses of the world, or the neglect of the Word, or an unchristian attitude towards family may be areas of the devil's attack in the Christian's life. When the devil or the world makes inroads into another Christian's life the will of God for you is to warn them in brotherly love and meekness. Remember Paul's words to the Galatian Christians:

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We also are susceptible to temptation. We also need encouragement in the faith.

In a similar way we should notice those who are struggling with the tribulations of life, finding it difficult to cope with these trials in faith, and comfort them with the assurance of God's love in Christ Jesus. Those who are weak and tremble before the world, or struggle with issues of faith, we uphold them with the Word and prayer.

And yes, it will happen that individuals will slip into the same pitfalls again and again because of the weakness of the flesh. Even as the Lord has been patient and enduring with us, so we will be with them, for this is the will of God in connection with Christ Jesus.

This is why we are here. This is the purpose the Lord has for you now in this life. You aren't here for fun and games. You aren't here to see how many toys you can accumulate in this life. You are here in this life so that you can be a blessing to others, starting with your fellow believers. You are here to encourage others as they walk the road to eternal life. It is not always easy, I don't mean just this pilgrimage, but fulfilling this God given purpose for us in this life. We will struggle with our patience at times. We will search for the

right words. We will pray for the courage to even address a difficult situation or one in which our Christian brother or sister is particularly hurting or ensnared in deep sin. Then remember that the Lord Himself has placed us here as His agents and He will be with us.

He is with us and reveals for us His will in connection with Christ Jesus --

II. In Our Daily Life.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

The Apostle's description of the Christian's life may sound very different from how we may describe our lives. He talks in spiritual terms about the different aspects of daily life when we usually talk in temporal, material terms. We talk about a daily schedule of activities like getting up in the morning and going to work, and getting that list of things done that are waiting for our attention. What happens is that while we are using God's gifts and abilities in our daily walk, we may at the same time be losing sight of what the Lord would have fill our day. And yes, His list can fill our day even when we are busy with work and other responsibilities.

Start with rejoicing. The Lord would have us rejoice always. Even when we are stressed, even when we are troubled with the problems of life. REJOICE, not in the problems of life but in the fact that we are not alone in the struggle. We have a Lord who loves us and delivered us from sin and its curse, and has promised us every blessing. We can rejoice even in affliction because the Lord is by our side assuring us that His will for our salvation will be accomplished. We abide in His love. And yes, in that we shall rejoice!

Accompanying this rejoicing will be prayer and thanksgiving. They flow together from faith. This doesn't mean that we won't do anything but sit and keep our hands folded while the rest of the world goes by. Quite the contrary! We shall be engaged in life

seeking the Lord's counsel and guidance and blessing in all that we do, and thanking the Lord for His many blessings in our lives.

Sometimes this is easy. I will give thanks to the Lord while I'm picking raspberries this afternoon. Sometimes it's not so easy or natural, as when we are struggling with sickness and continuing tribulation in life. But even then we count our blessings, first among them the Lord's love in Christ, then other friends and family that support or teams of professionals caring for us. We give thanks in all circumstances because we live under God's umbrella of grace and love.

As we are caught up in life we need to be careful not to quench the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has lit a fire in our hearts. Sometimes we can quench the Spirit. Zeal for the faith should be contagious. It should excite us to see others excited for the Lord and all that the Lord is doing in and through them in this world. We can be like a wet blanket. We can dampen the Spirit's fire not only in our own hearts but in the hearts of others as well. It's easy to do simply by telling people, "We just don't do things that way," or saying "We already tried that and it didn't work," or "Don't bother talking to them they won't listen," or "Those people already have their own religion," or even a very common, "Nobody is really interested in hearing about the Lord anymore." The Lord is the one who has directed us to a faith-filled, fruitful life. He backs us with His power and His love. What a marvelous privilege we have to serve Him, and to gather around His Word and learn more of Him by the study of Scripture.

As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior we will also grow in Christian discernment. The Lord would have us look at all those things that would seek to be a part of our lives, and use some Christian discernment to distinguish between that which is good and right and beautiful, and that which is tarnished with sin, and would drag us back toward the world. We will learn to judge organizations, and books and movies and TV shows, and associations, and even businesses where we might spend our time. We might ask how this would reflect on my known association with Jesus for others to know that I am involved in this particular activity, or spend my time in that particular establishment.

In all things we will seek to glorify God so that our testimony before the world is not discredited. We will abstain from every form of evil because we know the will of God for us in connection with Christ Jesus, is our sanctification. He has separated us from sin and its curse so that we might be His special people dedicated to good works and our role as His witnesses here on earth. We know His ultimate desire for each of us is our eternal salvation,

This is difficult for us to fulfill. Indeed it is beyond our capability to fulfill all that the Lord desires for our lives. It is this will for us in connection with Christ Jesus –

III. Which God Works in Us Completely.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

One of the things that jumps out at us in these closing verses of our text is that idea of sanctification. Sanctification is the setting apart from sin, dedicating something or someone for a holy purpose.

Often we make a false distinction in our thinking. We think God justifies, but then when it comes to my sanctified Christian life that is where I come into the picture. Sanctification is where I make an effort, so then isn't sanctification where I should take some credit?

It is absolutely true and evident from the very words of our text that that we are called upon to shun sin in our lives, that this is God's will for us. We were also called upon to rejoice and pray and praise the Lord, that this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us. But then we get to these closing verses of our text and we are taught "**the God of peace Himself will sanctify you completely**" (v.23).

"It is God who in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

The Apostle explains what that means. Our whole being, the way we think, our eternal soul, and yes, also our entire bodies, are

sanctified by God. He has separated us from every stain of sin by declaring us blameless in Christ. **“The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:6). We are washed clean. **“Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool”** (Isaiah 1:18).

This is what God has already done for you. **“As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us”** (Psalm 103:12). And this is what the Lord wills for us throughout this life until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus comes again God desires that we be found blameless on that day. Then we will be invited to join Him in the glories of eternal joy and bliss. *God does all this through the gospel.*

Today the Lord continues this work of sanctification unto eternal life as we receive the very body and true blood of Jesus in the sacrament of Holy Communion. We partake of Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins. God declares to each of us that this sacrifice covers our sins. We receive the personal individual assurance that this sanctifying power of God is being applied to each of us. We are each personally assured that we are holy, righteous children of God living at peace with Him. This is the will of God in connection with Christ Jesus for you.

That love and forgiveness and joy and confidence of salvation fills our hearts, and so we are empowered by God the Holy Spirit to dedicate ourselves body, soul, and spirit to the praise and glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

AMEN.

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