

I.N.I.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 23, 2011
II Thess. 2:13-3:5

In Christ Jesus, Who has called us to proclaim His Word of love and forgiveness to the rest of the world to the glory of His name and for the welfare of lost souls, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Another prediction has come and gone. The same man who predicted the world would end on May 21st and then changed his mind and said it would be Oct 21st was again wrong. That was this past Friday, the day I was working on this sermon. Did Christ come? Did the world end? No! We know that the 2 events are one and the same.

But what if you were told that the Messiah, the Christ had already returned and that you missed His coming? How would you feel? Distraught, confused, worried, upset? All of those feelings and maybe more plagued the Thessalonian Christians.

In chapter 2 the Apostle Paul wrote; **NOW BRETHREN, CONCERNING THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND OUR GATHERING TOGETHER TO HIM, WE ASK YOU, NOT TO BE SOON SHAKEN IN MIND OR TROUBLED, EITHER BY SPIRIT OR BY WORD OR BY LETTER, AS IF FROM US, AS THOUGH THE DAY OF CHRIST HAD COME. LET NO ONE DECEIVE YOU BY ANY MEANS...**

The Thessalonians were greatly troubled and confused over this matter of the Lord's second coming. Paul in the first part of chapter 2 briefly describes what some of the conditions in the world will be like prior to that day. He talks about the falling away of many from the faith and the coming of the man of sin, the Antichrist. In the portion that makes up our text this morning, Paul encourages these disturbed Christians, while they continued to wait for the Lord's return in a world that was growing more and more evil.

We are in the same situation. Christ has not yet returned. His coming has been promised and will happen. What should we do while we wait? How are we to endure and keep from becoming discouraged, impatient and confused? These are some of the questions that our text answers for us this morning.

WHAT SHALL WE DO UNTIL THE LORD RETURNS?

We have condensed our text down to two responses. Admittedly there are more things we should do. Our text, however, especially speaks of these two things:

- 1. STAND FIRM IN THE TEACHINGS YOU HAVE RECEIVED**
- 2. PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE AND CONVICTION**

Three things we should pray for:

- A. PRAY THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT PRESERVE HIS CHURCH**
- B. PRAY THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT INCREASE HIS CHURCH**
- C. PRAY THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT PROTECT HIS CHURCH**

We read vs. 13-17 **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, TO WHICH HE CALLED YOU BY OUR GOSPEL, FOR THE OBTAINING OF THE GLORY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. THEREFORE, BRETHREN, STAND FAST AND HOLD THE TRADITIONS WHICH YOU WERE**

TAUGHT, WHETHER BY WORD OR BY EPISTLE. 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, COMFORT YOUR HEARTS AND ESTABLISH YOU IN EVERY GOOD WORD AND WORK.

Paul once again gives thanks to God for these beloved believers; this time thanking God for their election--that from eternity God in His grace had chosen them to be His own children. How did this election come to pass? Paul tells us **THROUGH SANCTIFICATION BY THE SPIRIT AND BELIEF IN THE TRUTH, TO WHICH HE CALLED YOU BY OUR GOSPEL.** God brought about their salvation by the working of the Holy Spirit. People can choose to reject the truth of the Word, to reject Jesus as Lord and Savior, but they cannot choose to believe in Christ as their Savior. The ability to believe in Jesus, only the Holy Spirit can bring about in the heart of the individual by working the miracle of conversion or regeneration. Paul writes in Eph. 2:5 **WE WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS** and again he writes in I Cor. 12:3 **NO ONE CAN SAY THAT JESUS IS THE LORD EXCEPT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.** As they heard the Good News of Jesus' perfect life for them and His substitutionary death on the cross for them, the Holy Spirit called them out of the darkness of unbelief, led them to repent of their sins, and set them apart from the rest of the world by leading them to trust in Jesus and to accept as true what they heard. The Holy Spirit alone was the One who quickened them, that is made their spiritually dead hearts alive and led them to believe that salvation, redemption was theirs only through Jesus by what He had done for them.

Now they share in the glory of Jesus. His resurrection victory was their resurrection victory, His life was their life, His eternal home and glory was their eternal home and glory. It was theirs but it was not yet theirs. The Lord had not yet come to bestow these eternal blessings upon them.

Some 1,960 years later He still has not come. What should we be doing as we wait for the final fulfillment of our redemption? Paul says, **THEREFORE, BRETHREN, STAND FAST AND HOLD THE TRADITIONS WHICH YOU WERE TAUGHT, WHETHER BY WORD OR OUR EPISTLE.**

These are present imperatives. An imperative is a command and the present tense means to be ongoing, continuing. Therefore Paul is saying, "Continue day after day to be sunk deeply into the Word and cling tightly to the Word which you heard and were taught. These words you have heard from me are God's powerful words for salvation." Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter: **THESE THINGS WE ALSO SPEAK, NOT IN WORDS WHICH MAN'S WISDOM TEACHES BUT WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT TEACHES.** That's why we too need to grab hold of, firmly cling to and never let go of these words of scripture. They are God's own words to us. So that's one thing we should be doing until the Lord returns: **STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH.**

But that means more than just clinging to God's pure Word as taught in the Bible. It also means living that faith---putting it into practice in our daily lives--at home with our families, at work with our colleagues, at school with our classmates. It means sharing the Gospel with others--telling them of their Savior. It means speaking words of kindness and tenderness to them in troubled times and then serving them, so that they will see the love of Christ not only in what we say but also in what we do. It means forgiving each other and not holding grudges against one another.

Paul tells us what our motive will be to do this--**the LOVE of OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND OUR GOD AND FATHER.** He has given us everlasting consolation and a confident hope. Paul's prayer is that this love of God **COMFORT THEIR HEARTS AND ESTABLISH THEM IN EVERY GOOD WORD AND WORK.** And that is his prayer for you and me. On this Sunday we need to once again be led to rededicate ourselves to the preaching, hearing, teaching and spreading of God's Word so that we are established and comforted and willingly go out and speak

the good word at the proper time and do the good work when it is needed.

II: PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE AND CONVICTION

That leads us to the second thing we are to do while we wait for Christ's return. **PRAY!** Pray like the Apostle Paul did that the **HOLY SPIRIT PRESERVE HIS CHURCH.** Pray that the Holy Spirit continue to work in the hearts of believers around the world to keep them in the faith. Pray for our brothers and sisters in the CLC in Florida and Alaska, in California and South Carolina, in Nigeria and Nepal, in India and Tanzania, for our professors and students up at ILC, for all believers wherever they might be. Pray that Christ continues to reign in their hearts until He comes on the last day.

Secondly we need to pray that **THE HOLY SPIRIT INCREASE HIS CHURCH.** Paul writes in cha. 3:1-2 **FINALLY, BRETHREN, PRAY FOR US, THAT THE WORD OF THE LORD MAY RUN SWIFTLY AND BE GLORIFIED, JUST AS IT IS WITH YOU, AND THAT WE MAY BE DELIVERED FROM UNREASONABLE AND WICKED MEN; FOR NOT ALL HAVE FAITH.** Paul had prayed for the Thessalonians, now he asks that the roles be reversed. "Pray for us," he writes. We cannot pray for Paul, Silas and Timothy for they have died long ago, but we can pray for our missionaries today, our pastors and teachers so that God's Kingdom comes into the hearts of those to whom they speak. The time of the end is near. We need to pray that when we or our pastors, teachers and missionaries bring the Word to others that it swiftly penetrates the heart and bears fruit. Have you been doing that? Have you included in your daily prayers a prayer for the Word to have free course to be proclaimed and received by all who hear it? Have you prayed for God to give you the courage and ability to speak that Good News of forgiveness and salvation to others and then that the Holy Spirit use that Word to create faith in our neighbor's and friend's hearts?

Paul in a classic understatement writes; **FOR NOT ALL HAVE FAITH.** We see today that **NOT MANY HAVE FAITH.** Most are still lost in self-righteousness, or despair, or chasing after worldly riches and glory. And when the Word is brought to them most are not interested. Paul says they are **UNREASONABLE AND WICKED MEN.** They are wicked in their attack on God and His Word and sometimes even His messengers. Should that stop us from speaking the Word to others, from praying for the success of God's Word? Of course not! When Paul was in Corinth he was told in a vision from God; **DO NOT BE AFRAID, BUT KEEP ON SPEAKING, AND DO NOT KEEP SILENT; FOR I AM WITH YOU, AND NO ONE WILL ATTACK YOU TO HURT YOU; FOR I HAVE MANY PEOPLE IN THIS CITY.** How many people does God have here in the Madison area that have not yet heard His Word, that He will bring into His kingdom through His Gospel? Is it your spouse, grandfather, aunt, cousin, friend, next door neighbor, fellow worker, classmate, the next stranger you meet? Do not be afraid, keep on speaking the Word, do not be silent! Then pray for the Lord to **INCREASE HIS CHURCH!**

And finally **PRAY that the HOLY SPIRIT PROTECT HIS CHURCH.**

We read vs. 3-5 **BUT THE LORD IS FAITHFUL, WHO WILL ESTABLISH YOU AND GUARD YOU FROM THE EVIL ONE. AND WE HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD CONCERNING YOU, BOTH THAT YOU DO AND WILL DO THE THINGS WE COMMAND YOU. NOW MAY THE LORD DIRECT YOUR HEARTS INTO THE LOVE OF GOD AND INTO THE PATIENCE OF CHRIST.**

Everywhere we go we are in danger. Not so much danger from robbers, rapists, murderers and terrorists, but from the roaring lion, Satan. He prowls around, hungry as ever seeking to spiritually devour you and me. He also has many cohorts---this sinful world and our own sinful flesh. Were it not for the protection of our Lord God we would be easy prey and a quick dessert. But the **LORD**

IS FAITHFUL. HE WILL ESTABLISH US AND GUARD US FROM THE EVIL ONE, even as we pray in the Lord's pray **DELIVER US FROM EVIL.**

What confidence we see in Paul. He is miles away from Thessalonica. He probably will not be able to go back and preach to them in person. He knows that they had very little face to face instruction from him, that they are a small group, that they have been suffering persecution. He knows how many evil and spiritual dangers are lurking around them and yet he can boldly write: **AND WE HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD CONCERNING YOU, BOTH THAT YOU DO AND WILL DO THE THINGS WE COMMAND YOU.**

Paul's confidence does not rest in the members. They are still plagued by the effects of their own sinful flesh, which makes their obedience and faith walk unpredictable, just like ours. Paul's confidence is in the Lord Jesus and in their relationship with that Savior. He is confident that they will remain in the truth of God's Word and motivated by that Word of God's love in Christ they will continue to do what God wills.

That is Paul's confidence for you and me as well. Even though Paul didn't know us, these words apply to us. Our confidence is not in ourselves. What messes we make of our lives. But our Savior God works it all out for our eternal good, forgives us of our failures and then motivates us to live for Him. Paul's closing prayer for us is that the Lord direct our hearts like an arrow straight into **THE LOVE OF GOD AND INTO THE PATIENCE OF CHRIST.**

- 1. Stand firm in His Word.**
- 2. Put into practice what you believe.**
- 3. Speak the Good News of Jesus to others.**
- 4. And pray for His Church.**

Pray for the Lord's preservation and protection and that He will increase our faith and bring countless others into His kingdom. We have every reason to **REJOICE!** We have many reasons to **PRAY.** We have nothing to **FEAR!**

Amen.