

**Preacher: Vicar Tim Redfield      Date: November 15, 17, and 18**  
**Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13 – 3:5      Theme: Stand Firm in Your Calling**

How can I be sure? How can I be sure that God is going to give me eternal life? How can I be sure that I am truly saved? How can any of us be sure? Sometimes doubts can arise in our minds regarding our forgiveness and our eternal life. There are many reasons for these doubts. There may be any number of problems that come up in our lives that cause us to doubt the love of God. Our sinful nature and the devil are constantly trying to get us to fall away from God. Because of all of our sins we sometimes wonder how God could forgive us. God understands that there are reasons that we fall into that sin of doubt. That is why he gives us the encouragement in his Word which helps us to remain strong in our faith. God tells us through the Apostle Paul to stand firm in our calling. We are able to stand firm in our faith because God's grace gives us eternal comfort. Once we have that comfort, we display God's love as we persevere until we reach our heavenly home.

### **Part 1: God's grace gives us eternal comfort**

Paul starts this section of the letter by saying that he and the other missionaries with him always give thanks for the Thessalonians. Paul was thankful for their faith. The Thessalonians had eagerly received the Word of God. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians, "And we thank God continually because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (2:13). He had written the first letter to encourage the new faith of the Thessalonians. He encouraged them to remain blameless until the Lord's Second Coming (1 Thess. 3:13, 5:23). He mentioned the Lord's return in judgment many times in the first letter and this raised questions among the Thessalonians.

Paul wrote the second letter to again encourage those believers, to clear up those questions about the last day, and to give the Thessalonians the comfort that they are blameless through Christ and they will inherit the kingdom of God. Paul encourages them to stand firm in that salvation won for them by Christ.

As we look at our own spiritual lives, we may wonder how well we are standing firm in our faith. If the Apostle Paul were to write a letter to Faith Lutheran Church, would he give thanks for our faith or would he reprimand us for sin? Would Paul praise us for the high value that we give to the Word of God? There are times that we are apathetic toward the Word of God. We do not always act like the Thessalonians who treated that Word with the highest respect. Even though many of us come to church every week, we do not always look for opportunities to share the word of God or take advantage of the chances that we have to grow in our faith. We sin when we do not make time to grow in our faith through study and meditation in the Word. We sin when we keep that Word of God to ourselves rather than sharing it.

Do we have that attitude of Paul which is thankful for our fellow believers? Sometimes we do not act as though we are thankful for the people who join us in church every week. There are many ways that we can sin against our fellow Christians. There may be times that we pass along rumors which harm the reputations of others. We do not always take the words and actions of other believers in the kindest possible way. Some of us may not give the proper respect to our pastors, teachers, board members, parents, and others who deserve our respect. There can even be times that our sinful heart holds grudges against other Christians rather than practicing our Christ-like love and forgiving others who have wronged us.

Because of all these sins, our hearts can become troubled. We are concerned about how terrible we must appear in the sight of God. That is why God reminds us of the comfort of the Gospel. He tells us in verses 13 and 14 about how he has chosen us from the beginning, he has sanctified us in the Spirit, he called us by the gospel, and therefore we have obtained the glory of Christ. We are reminded of the fact that we are not saved because we have lived a blameless life. We know that our life is tainted with sin. The Thessalonians needed to be reminded of that and so do we. Our sins are real and they are terrible. They can even destroy faith if we are impenitent. That is why our life can never save us.

We have been made blameless through Christ. We see how he lived the blameless life in regard to the sins we just looked at. We know that Jesus gave the Word of God a very high priority in his life. This can be seen in his preaching and teaching in the four gospels. He opened the scriptures as he instructed people. After his Resurrection, as he was walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he did what he had done many times in his ministry. That day, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Jesus also lived that blameless life by acting in a loving way toward everyone. He did not give anyone a bad name. He spoke well of others. He gave respect to the government and he even dealt patiently with the Jewish

religious leaders and some of them came to faith in him. He showed that he did not hold the sins of wicked men against them. When he was being crucified he showed his love for sinners by saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). With that perfect life and innocent death he won the victory over sin for us.

We can take comfort in the fact that God chose us from the beginning. This emphasizes again that our salvation does not depend on us. Before we had done anything, before we had committed one sin, God knew that he was going to save us by working faith in our hearts. When the time was right he sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify us. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). He worked in our hearts to make us holy and blameless in his sight. Christ paid for our sins and the Holy Spirit gave us the faith to trust in that forgiveness. That is how salvation takes place through the gospel. The wonderful Gospel message is used by the Spirit to give us faith. The glory of Christ that we obtain is that perfect righteousness that he clothes us with and the eternal glory that we will have in heaven.

## **Part 2: We display God's love as we persevere**

In verse 15 Paul gives us the encouragement to stand firm in our faith and hold to the teachings of the Bible. We stand firm in the faith every time we stand up for what God says in the Bible. Jesus told us in John 8, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." This is why we stress so much the doctrines of the Bible. At times this puts us at odds with our society and even other churches. Our society can view us as close minded for believing what we do but we continue to hold to the truth of God's Word. It is actually an expression of Christian love to hold to the truth of God's Word because we point out sin so that people may repent and believe in Jesus as their Savior. We lovingly point out sin because we do not want anyone to perish forever in hell.

This encouragement to stand firm in our faith reminds us of the Biblical doctrine of Church Fellowship. Because we hold close to the teachings of our Savior, we do not join in activities or in worship with churches that do not hold to the teachings of the Bible. The Apostles Paul urges us to "watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17). Even if a church professes to be Christian, they may wander away from scriptures on issues such as the Lord's Supper, Baptism, how we come to faith, or the power of the Word of God. We need to stay away from these churches so that we do not wander away from the true faith.

In the beginning verses of chapter 3, Paul tells us that part of our standing firm is that we maintain an active prayer life. Paul speaks of areas that are important to pray for as we await the return of our Lord. We pray for the spread of the Word of God and that the Word may be honored. As the Day of Judgment draws closer and closer, it is important that the Word of God continue to spread so that many more may know the love of God. Also we see that many people resist the Word of God and some people completely turn their back on God. That is why Paul asks that the Thessalonians pray that believers would be delivered from wicked and evil men. In our country we are protected from life-threatening persecution but that could change. There are still places in the World where Christians put their life on the line for the spread of the Gospel.

In the last verse on our reading we hear that God is the one who directs our hearts into love and perseverance. Because we have been strengthened in our faith through the gospel, we have hearts that are filled with Christian love. Christ showed his love for us in the fact that he endured the agonizing punishment of the cross in our place. He lived that flawless life in our place. We are strengthened through God's Word so that we can persevere until the Day of Judgment. We are strengthened by our fellow believers. We build each other up because we are all part of God's family. We look out for each other and comfort each other with our forgiveness and our hope of eternal life in heaven.

## **Conclusion**

We are triumphant saints. We are triumphant because Jesus has given us the victory over sin, death and the devil. God chose us to be his own. He made us his saints through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. We have been given the glory of the Lord. This means that we have the perfection of Christ and we will enter in to the eternal glory of heaven when this life is over. All these facts give us an attitude that reflects the love of our Savior. We stand firm in our faith. Our Lord tells us to "be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10). God blesses us with the ability to persevere until the end and then he gives us life everlasting.