

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Ninth Sunday After Trinity, August 9, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 248 (3:4) 482, 472, 410

Lessons: 2 Chronicles 1:7-12; James 2:14-17; Mark 10:17-27

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of Christ our Lord, dear friends,

When Jesus ascended into heaven, two angels told the disciples, ***“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven,”*** Acts 1:11. The apostles of the Lord then preached that Jesus was coming back on the Last Day. Peter also wrote, ***“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray,”*** 1 Peter 4:7. About 2,000 years have passed since Peter wrote this. For this reason many unbelievers mock the Word of the Lord that speaks of the end of the world and the Day of Judgement. It is as Peter wrote, ***“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation,’”*** 2 Peter 3:3-4.

On the other hand, when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he had to warn them not to give up working and not to sit idly waiting for the coming of the Lord. The Lord Jesus spoke clearly about the Last Day, saying, ***“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come,”*** Matthew 24:42.

The Lord does not want us to mock the truth that he is coming again. He also does not want us to give up working and sit idly by waiting for the Last Day. What he does want us to do and what he will do for us is told us in our text. So let us consider,

**PAUL’S REQUEST AND CONFIDENCE CONCERNING HIS BELIEVING HEARERS.**

- 1. Paul’s request that the believers pray for those who preach and the message they proclaim;**
- 2. Paul’s confidence that the believing hearers will remain steadfast unto the end through God’s grace and power.**

Often we read in the epistles that the apostles prayed for the believers in Christ. In Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians he wrote, ***“We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith,”*** 2 Thessalonians 1:11. Paul also wrote, ***“We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers,”*** 1 Thessalonians 1:2. It is an important part of a pastor’s work that he pray for those who hear him. He should pray for both their physical and spiritual welfare, and above all ask that God keep them in the true faith unto life eternal.

But in our text the Apostle Paul requests that the believers in Christ pray for him and the other apostles. This was not a selfish request on the part of Paul. He was not asking that his hearers pray that those who preach the Gospel would have an easy time of it and lead a comfortable life with no problems. He was concerned

about the spreading of the Gospel message. ***“Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.”*** The Lord commanded believers, ***“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,”*** Mark 16:15. If this command is to be carried out it is necessary that the Gospel Word spread rapidly. The psalmist says of the Lord, ***“He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.”*** Psalm 147:15.

It should be understood that the Apostle Paul was not asking the believers to pray for the spread of the Gospel so that great multitudes would suddenly call themselves Christians without coming to faith in Jesus. Paul was not asking that people should be accepted into membership in a congregation without proper instruction. We hear about congregations in our day that have a large membership very quickly without the members receiving the proper instruction in the truths of God’s Word.

What Paul wanted believers to pray for was that through the preaching of the Gospel people would come to know the truth of God’s holy Word. In this way, Paul said the Word of the Lord would be ***“honored, just as it was with you.”*** From reading the letters of Paul to the various congregations he served, we know how carefully he instructed the people. We know also how the Gospel Word was honored because of this. It is the very nature of the Gospel Word that it is powerful to create faith in Jesus. That’s why Paul wrote, ***“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,”*** Romans 1:16. The Gospel is more than just a statement of truths. It is the powerful means of grace to create faith in the heart of the hearer and to sustain that faith. We know that the unbelievers in the world consider the Gospel as foolishness because they cannot understand spiritual truths. But the Bible says, ***“God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe,”*** 1 Corinthians 1:21. Paul also wrote, ***“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you,”*** 1 Corinthians 15:2.

When God’s Word is freely preached without hindrance in this world, and many by God’s grace come to faith in Jesus, then it is that the Gospel is ***“honored”***. An example of this is what is said of the Gentiles when Paul announced that he would go to the Gentile nations to preach. We are told, ***“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region,”*** Acts 13:48-49. This is a blessing for which we who believe in Christ also should pray. We in our day should pray for God’s blessings upon our pastors and upon the work of spreading the Gospel in the world.

Another blessing for which the Thessalonian believers were asked to pray was this: ***“Pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.”*** There were perverse and wicked people in Paul’s time who tried to prevent the Gospel from being preached. We are told, ***“When the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, ‘Your blood is on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles,’*** Acts 18:6. There are people like that today also, for Paul says, ***“not everyone has faith”***. They work against themselves by refusing to hear the Gospel, and they also do not want the Gospel to be spread to others. We can expect much opposition to the Gospel in these last days of the world because the Bible foretells it. It is important that we learn to do as Paul says, ***“pray for us”***. We should ask the Lord to deliver the pastors in our day when they experience this opposition. We should ask the Lord to preserve the pastors in the true faith despite all the assaults of Satan. This is important, not just as a blessing for the pastors, but that many more people come to know Jesus Christ as the only Savior from sin and damnation.

Having made a request of the believers at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul also assures them of his **confidence that the believing hearers will remain steadfast unto the end through God’s grace and power.**

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Paul was not only thinking about himself and the other preachers of the Gospel being delivered from ***“wicked and evil men,”*** but he wanted to assure his hearers of God’s blessings for them. ***“But the Lord is***

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***faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.***” The believers in the days of the apostles had to suffer much opposition when they confessed their faith in Jesus in the midst of an unbelieving majority. Paul had foretold, ***“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,”*** Acts 14:22. So we too will have to suffer for the sake of our faith in Jesus. Jesus says, ***“In this world you will have trouble,”*** John 16:33. Jesus also tells us, ***“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you,”*** John 15:19. Jesus also added, ***“No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also,”*** John 15:20. Peter writes, ***“If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps,”*** 1 Peter 2:20-21. We also have to battle against the devil when he slyly tempts us to give up God’s Word and our faith in Jesus. ***“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings,”*** 1 Peter 5:8-9.

Paul assures the believers, ***“We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.”*** What is it that the Thessalonian believers were doing? Paul had told them, ***“Your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring,”*** 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4. They were faithfully using God’s Word. Here we have to remember that God the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel as a means of grace to strengthen and keep us in the true faith unto the end. He wants us to be faithful in using the means of grace, the Gospel in word and sacrament.

We also are to learn from our text that for us to remain steadfast unto the end is an utter impossibility without the grace and power of God. Paul does not say that he had confidence in the people and their ability to remain faithful. He says, ***“We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.”*** Thank God that we are not left to ourselves to remain faithful and live in accordance with God’s Word. If we had to depend upon ourselves, we could have no confidence of remaining steadfast in the faith. We would simply be left to boast about our works and our efforts, and we would end up in hell.

At the close of our text Paul prays, ***“May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.”*** While we are waiting for Christ to come again at the Last Day, let us for the strengthening of our faith remember what our Lord Jesus endured as the Divine Substitute for sinners. Paul writes, ***“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,”*** Romans 3:22b-24. ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification,”*** Romans 4:25. We are exhorted, ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart,”*** Hebrews 12:2-3.

Then we may have the confidence in the Lord that he will keep us in the faith, for we are assured, ***“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it,”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:24. Amen.

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