

**Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church**

2nd Week After Epiphany

January 15th, 2012

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

**God Encourages Us to Pray for Encouragement**

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Page 10 in the front of the hymnal has some prayers that you can say before the service starts. How many of you used the prayers on page 10 this morning? How do those prayers work anyway? You pray that you would get more out of the church service basically. How do those prayers work? God's word is powerful enough whether you say a prayer before church or not. But for those who pray some kind of a prayer like that before church, there's kind of a double comfort. We already have the promise that

God's Word is powerful to do something in our hearts and affect us inside. But when we say a prayer before church, we have another promise. The promises of the Bible that prayer in Jesus name always does something. A double comfort. That's the kind of thing that is happening in our Bible passage.

In the first part of our lesson Paul loads on these encouragements and promises. And then in the second part he has a prayer to God that these promises would have a powerful effect on the Christians in Thessalonica. And through Paul's example God is encouraging us to pray that same kind of a prayer. To pray that God's beautiful encouragements would have a powerful effect in our hearts and in the hearts of people we love.

God encourages you today to do like Paul did for the people of Thessalonica. God encourages you to pray for encouragement. What are some of those beautiful encouragements? Verse 13 Paul calls the Thessalonians and he calls you brothers. But what kind of brothers? Brothers loved by the Lord! I went to our public library and started looking at the backs of our movies because I knew that some of them would talk about being loved. And sure enough the sound of music said that it had some of the world's best love songs in it. Or Winnie the Pooh video said that it came from the beloved classic Winnie the pooh book. What if you could imagine being loved by that many people. As many people that have loved the songs on the sound of music or that have ever loved a Winnie the Pooh story. That would be a lot of people to love you. And you have something better right here when the Lord says he loves you. It's even better than to be loved by millions of weak, dying, lying sinners. To be loved by the almighty Creator of everything that exists.

Why does he love you? Is it because of the kind of person that you are? Is it because of all the fine choices that you make in your life? No way. We often make choices that we regret. Selfish choices and sometimes the worst mistakes that we make are because we are careless to even make a choice about something.

But he says why does the almighty Lord love you? Verse 13. Because from the beginning God chose you to be saved. The devil would say that God made a bad choice there. He would point to all of your sins and would say, "What are you doing choosing someone like that." But that's exactly why God chose you, isn't it? To save you! To save you from your bad choices. To save you from you sins. God chose you and sent his Son to wash away all your sins with his blood on the cross. God chose you from the beginning. Already by 12:01A.M. the first day of creation God had your name in his almighty brain. He chose you to be saved from the beginning.

Not only that, he chose you through the sanctifying work of the spirit, verse 13 says. What does that mean? Sanctifying means that the Holy Spirit takes you apart from the sinful world and makes you serve him. The devil had everybody on his team. From birth everybody is born a sinner on the devil's team. The Holy Spirit comes and takes you and puts you on his team. Away from team evil and on to team holy. That means we will never sin anymore? That's not it. At least there's a fight inside of you when you are tempted to sin, because the holy spirit has begun his sanctifying work.

How does this all work? God chose you to be saved and God chose you to be sanctified. How? Through belief in the truth. Though many people have it turned around. They think the reason that God chose them was because God looked into the future and said, "that's the kind of person who will believe in me." But it really is the other way around. Our text says the reason you believe in God is because God chose you to believe in him. Ask a young piano player who decided that you would learn to play the piano and they would say "Oh my mother did," you might say. Ask a Christian who decided that you would believe in God, the answer should be, "My Father in heaven." My Father chose from the beginning of the world that I would be saved, that I would be sanctified, that I would believe in him. How believe in him? He called you to this. He called you to this through our gospel.

There's the story of little Johnny who hid behind the garage because he heard his mother calling him and he thought it was time to stop playing, but really his mother was calling him because his uncle was there ready to take him to the lake. And his uncle was getting tired of waiting and was going to leave without him. May people all around us hide from God's Word and hide from God's call to the gospel, when they are missing out on a lot more

than a trip to the lake with uncle. Verse 14: God calls the people through the gospel that they might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. How about that? All the other things we have heard so far God has given us at least in part, but this glory is something we are still waiting for. We are like the unborn baby, all put together, all its little parts, no body gets to see it yet. No body gets to see that glorious cute little baby face. So all the parts of our salvation have been given to us. But we don't get to see it quite yet. That glory we will have in heaven

And we have this written down for us. The Thessalonians didn't. Paul had to say to them, "Hold onto the teaching passed down to you whether by word of mouth or by letter. This is only the second or third letter of the new testament to be written. Most of the N.T. hadn't been written yet. Most of the glorious promises that we enjoy so much in the N.T. weren't on paper yet, but now they are. Are you like me? You are probably going to forget something unless you write it down? Or maybe you put it in your I phone. God wrote it down. He wanted us to be so sure he wrote it all down. His beautiful encouragements. These are top notch promises that are all written down for us. Line after line after line. You could have a whole sermon on just a few of the words that Paul has for us in the first part of our text.

What does he say about these encouragements? Stand firm and hold to them. And that's the difficult part sometimes. God lays out all these beautiful encouragements for us but we have a hard time holding to them. We have a hard time feeling encouraged by them sometimes. We know how important this is. If were to look at what comes before our text we would see a strong warning about how important this is as Paul talks about how the Christian church would degenerate. It would fall apart as people didn't love the good news and didn't love the truth. And the church of God would be filled with lies. Think about Martin Luther and he found that practically the whole continent of Europe was filled with churches, but empty of the gospel. Because for generations people had taken the good news for granted until they had practically lost it. We will never lose it, right?

That's probably what the Israelites said as God rescued them from slavery and as he proved his love to them, but only a generation later God's promises and encouragements were lost and forgotten. But that will never happen to us.

A lot of marriages start out that way. "Divorce, that will never happen to us." Sadly enough we see that many of these couples are wrong to be so confident. Do we have the same false confidence? I hope not. We could never lose our appreciation for the good news and all the encouragements God has for us. Rather we are a little intimidated by these facts and warnings and we want assurance not only that God has encouragements for us but that he is going to help us take these encouragements to heart and hold on to them and stand firm in them, and never take them for granted. What encouragement does God have for that?

He says, "Do like Paul, pray to me." Pray to me that these encouragements would take root in your heart and strengthen you. "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." May these encouragements not just be letters on a page, but may they I pray get you right in the heart and encourage you and make you strong. As we pray for these things will we get an answer. Of course!

Look at all the names God uses for himself. He could've just said may God strengthen you and encourage you. But he lists all these names. Our Lord who paid so much to own us. Jesus, the Lord saves us from our sins. Christ, God's anointed one. Our prophet, priest, and king. And he is God our Father who cares about us as his own dear children. Will he hear our prayer? When we pray that his Word will take root in our hearts and encourage us. Yes he will. Every time we think about these names of God we should think about him as our God ready to help us, ready to answer our every prayer.

What other reasons do we have to expect an answer to our prayer. He loved us and by grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope. There are a lot of other comforts and encouragements that are out there. How many of them are eternal? How many things that make you feel good throughout the week and that give you comfort last forever. This that God has for us is eternal encouragement. Don't you think he will answer you if you pray to him, "Dear God help me"? Be encouraged by the encouragement you have in your Word. Of course he is going to want to answer prayer. Can you imagine if a parent was sending all kinds of encouraging letters to their son serving in the military overseas. And the child says, "Oh mom I didn't know you wanted me to open those and read them." Here God has all these encouragements for us. Longer than any mother's letter to her son. Will he answer you when you pray, "Dear God help me. Help me to be encouraged and strengthened by these wonderful things you have written."

God encourages you and he encourages you to pray for that encouragement. To be powerful in your heart and in the hearts of those you love. He is eager and excited to answer that prayer from you.