

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS

Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz

Advent 3 Series B. December 11, 2011

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24



¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil. ²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

I watch for our Mail lady – in her baby blue Jeep with the steering wheel on the British side. I watch for our Mail lady – because you never know what might be coming in the mail! Sometimes the most wonderful stuff comes in the mail. For weeks and weeks now – the catalogs have been coming – fast and furious! One of the neatest – I think – is a catalog where you can order animals to help people. For \$25 you can buy 2 chickens – which would result in thousands of eggs! You can buy a pair of goats for \$150 – and that would mean milk and cheese and yogurt – which you could eat – or even sell – to make money – to buy medicine! And – it says – your little goats would make fertilizer – which would make your vegetables grow better! I never thought of that – either! For \$500 you could buy a dairy cow – that could give a family 5,000 gallons of milk – which works out to 120,000 glasses of milk. Or you could give a sheep for \$105 and you get wool to make sweaters and blankets. And it says – when you give a sheep – you remember the Lamb of God – who takes away the sins of the world! That's the ultimate Christmas gift – a Savior – born into this sin spoiled world – to take away all our sins. Where did Advent go? Here it is already the 3rd Sunday in Advent. And God's Word talks about sanctification – putting our faith into practice. It's about living as a redeemed child of God – by grace through faith. Part of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians reminds us:

Advent Is All About Attitude!

- 1. Reject hurtful evil**
- 2. Celebrate God's grace**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on – is part of the Apostle Paul's first letter to the believers in the city of Thessalonica. What do you know about Thessalonica? If you lived back in early New Testament times you would know about Thessalonica. Thessalonica was about 10 times as many people as Watertown. It has been compared to Chicago or St. Louis – kind of the gateway to the east and west. It was in Macedonia – that's the part of Greece north of the kind of fingers hanging down part. Thessalonica was connected. If there was one thing

the Romans knew how to do it was build roads. They built them in layers – with the hardest stones – so that they have stood the test of time. Two thousand years later – some of their roads are still good. Compare that with the potholes on 3rd street – where you could lose a small child! The interstate highways in the United States – first engineered and built during the days of President – General Dwight D. Eisenhower – were based on the Roman model – of being able to move troops quickly from one part of the country to another or to evacuate people quickly and safely if we needed to. In Bible Class we talked about the concept of one in every 5 miles of interstate highway must be straight and even reinforced – so that military planes can land on it – in an emergency! That sounded pretty good to me – but there are all kinds of places on the *Internet* that say this is an urban myth. I don't know! What I do know – for a fact – is that the Christ child was born to save me from all my sins – so whenever I die and however I die – I know for sure and for certain I will wake up in Heaven. Jesus took all my sins away. I am right with my Heavenly Father for Jesus' sake. And that's all that really matters!

The first letter to the Thessalonians is just 5 chapters long – just 89 verses – all together. The second letter to the Thessalonians is just 3 chapters long – just 47 verses – all together. That means if you read both letters to the Thessalonians there's only 136 verses. That would not take long at all! One of the most powerful comforts in all of God's Word is in 1st Thessalonians. Pastors literally stand at the head of a casket – held by straps over the empty vault – at the cemetery and say to you – God's Word says to you – by the power of the Easter Gospel – **“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him!”** 5:13,14 Paul told the Thessalonians when Judgment Day comes – we who are still alive – and that could very well be you and me! We who are still alive when Jesus tears open the sky – and we see him and all the angels – we are not going to haul off to Heaven – leaving behind the people just up the hill from my house – the people in Immanuel Cemetery. We are not going to leave behind the people just down the road from my house – the people in the Lutheran Cemetery. We are not going to leave behind the people over the hill in Oak Hill Cemetery – or the people in St. Paul's Cemetery in Ixonia – or the people in Glenview Memorial this side of Ixonia. When Jesus returns we will hear the Arch Angel Michael speak. We will hear a trumpet the likes of which this world has never heard. Then people who believe in Jesus will be raised from their graves – wherever they were buried – wherever their ashes were scattered. Then together with them we will be caught up together – into the sky – to meet Jesus in the air. It's like we can't wait for him to get all the way here – before we go up and up and up to meet him! **And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore let us encourage each other with these words! 1 Thessalonians 4:17b,18**

¹⁶ **Rejoice always,** ¹⁷ **pray continually,** ¹⁸ **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.** This is about attitude – the attitude of people who love Jesus and believe in Him. It's an attitude that you can see in their lives. **Rejoice always!** There is a joyful calm deep inside the hearts of God's people – even in the midst of troubles and difficulties – because we know – in the end – it's going to be a happy ending. This is certainly not to say –

people of God have an easy time in this world. Read God's Word. Read about the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. ³² **And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. ³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Read your Bible! Read Romans chapter 8. ¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. Keep reading Romans chapter 8. ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

²⁰ **Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.** Treat God's Word with respect! We do this literally when we take care – literally of our Bible. Take a look at the Bible your child brings to TSL or Sunday School or Confirmation Class. It is distressing – to see Bibles with their covers – their hard covers torn completely off – with ink scribbles all over the edges of the pages – to find whole books of the Bible torn out of the Bible – so you literally can't read chunks of a Gospel or an Epistle of Paul. We show respect for God's Word – by reading it. Long ago and far away I visited a grandma. She had a Bible on her coffee table. I ran my finger across the cover – and said do you know what this means? She said – she's a poor housekeeper? I said, "No. It means you don't read this

Bible." Nobody dusts their TV remotes. Nobody dusts their cell phone. Nobody dusts their video game controls. We show respect when we read our Bible. Read the Gospel of John. Read the letter to the Romans or Corinthians or Galatians or Ephesians. Come to Bible Class and learn God's Word. If the last time we came to Bible Class was when we were 13 years old – it has been too long! Almost every occupation in the world has some system of continuing education. We need to study the Scriptures – to read God's Word – so we will grow in our faith – increase in our understanding!

²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is certainly not by accident that this week we got in the mail a post card from our Publishing House about Lenten Resources. With Jesus' permission the 2012 Lenten Series will be: *See His Cross! Surprising Words From Our Savior's Passion*. God's plan for our salvation was always clear. Jesus had to make the journey to his cross and resurrection in order to forgive our sins. Follow Jesus on that Journey from Ash Wednesday to his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday. You will see clearly how each event along the way fulfilled God's plan. This Lenten series includes the usual nine sermons: six midweek sermons, plus Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Each sermon centers on an event on the road to Jesus' death and resurrection. We will hear Jesus in Gethsemane tell Simon Peter, "Put Your Sword Away!" We will hear Jesus say – what he taught was no secret – he spoke openly in the temple courtyard – preaching that he is the Christ – the promised Messiah – the Passover Lamb. For Jesus to be beaten and battered and mocked and to have his beard pulled out – was all part of his Heavenly Father's plan from Beginning to end to buy us back. We will hear Jesus tell women who wept tears of pity for him – to instead to weep for themselves – if people did this when the tree was green – when he was innocent – what will happen when it is a dry dead tree – people dead in their trespasses and sins? Glory be to Jesus – who endured the shame of the cross – to save us from our sins. We know the peace and confidence of Easter – Jesus' triumph over death and the grave is our triumph, too!

To God alone all glory!