

Rev. Luke C. Werre
Peace, Sun Prairie
November 5, 2017
End Time 1 – Reformation

2 Timothy 4:9-18

ARE YOU IN THE CONFLICT FOR SALVATION?

We speak of the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant. The Church Triumphant is all the believers in heaven who are already enjoying the triumph that Christ won for them. The Church Militant is the believers who are still in the struggle of this life. We are the Church Militant. Not “militant” in the sense of militant Muslims who wage a physical war of terror. We have no interesting in conquering earthly domains. Nor does the term Church Militant refer to the earthly struggles common to all people. Our conflict is spiritual. It is the desperate struggle not to fall away from faith in Christ, the thankless toil to preserve the true Gospel against all wrong teachings, and also the hardship of enduring the rage of the world, the powers of hell, and our own raging sinful flesh who want to destroy our faith in Christ even as we attempt to spread the Gospel for the salvation of all.

This is the conflict Martin Luther was engaged in 500 years ago when God used him to bring about the Great Reformation of the Church. Through Luther God brought into public clarity once again the saving Gospel. The thanks he got was to be declared an outlaw with a price on his head. But the Reformation is not a one-time happening. The enemies of the Gospel will not rest as long as this world endures. So we cannot rest to preserve the Gospel and proclaim it as long as God gives us life and breath. That's, in fact, why He has put us here. It is an ongoing conflict for salvation –our own salvation and the salvation of others.

The portion of God's Word we are focusing on today gives us opportunity to ask, *Are you in the conflict for salvation?* How bleak things were for the Apostle Paul! By this time he was feeling his age, imprisoned during the persecutions under the Roman emperor Nero, and on trial. Paul was well aware things were not going well. He wrote to Timothy, *Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.* We don't know who this Alexander was, but he

apparently made a compelling case to the secular judge why Paul should be condemned. Eventually, Paul would be executed.

Paul was lonely, He wrote to Timothy, *Do your best to come to me quickly. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.* It was cold in that dungeon. He requested Timothy, *When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas.* Above all, even though he was an apostle, He needed to stay in the Scriptures. He wrote, *and [also bring] my scrolls, especially the parchments.*

In this part of his letter Paul mentions several individuals. Now, everything about this is historical fact. It actually happened. But as you hear about these individuals ask yourself: which one am I? Am I in the conflict for salvation?

Are you a Paul? For all his unfair suffering, his public disgrace, the bleak outlook of things, listen to Paul's number one concern as he stood trial: *The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.* Is that you? No matter how bad things are

or what's going on in your personal life and no matter what it will cost you, your number one concern is that more people hear the pure Gospel? Even those who are trying to do you damage? Are you on the front line with your family or at work or toward the parents of your kids' friends concerned for their eternal well-being even as they look down on you for your Christian life? Are you still sticking to the truth of God's Word even when family members might resent you because their path doesn't jibe with what God says is right? Are you the sort of person who engages people in conversations about the faith to win them over to Christ and the truth? Are you in the conflict as a Paul?

Or are you Luke? Faithful Luke, who stood by Paul. Luke, who never appears to be at the center of controversy or conflict, but supported the message in every way he could. As a doctor he no doubt helped sustain Paul physically in his old age. Imagine all the pains and physical infirmities Paul must have been dealing with -a man who had been cruelly flogged more than once, had been stoned and left for dead, who had suffered from hunger and cold and even survived a shipwreck. It is likely that Luke even supported Paul financially. As an intelligent man he researched carefully and wrote the books of Luke and Acts so that

Christians would have an accurate record of things. He provided prayers and companionship and moral support for Paul. Are you a Luke? Maybe you're not on the front lines of the fight for the Gospel but you've always been there, supporting the work of the church with the first fruits of your income, preparing a Sunday School lesson, praying for our faculty, someone that the pastor can fall back on for assistance with whatever skills God has given you. Maybe you've always been the one standing by your husband as he disciplines the children or helping to facilitate when he leads family devotions. Are you in the conflict for salvation as a Luke?

Are you more like Mark? The first time Mark accompanied Paul on one of his missionary journeys, Mark ditched Paul and went home. The next time when Barnabas wanted to bring Mark along Paul argued against it. He didn't trust Mark. But now it appears Mark may have grown up a little. Church tradition has it that Mark apprenticed under Peter. Maybe some of Peter's boldness rubbed off on him. Whatever the case, though Mark was at one time, humanly speaking, not worth much to the cause of the Gospel, the Lord Jesus gave him a second chance and turned him around and now Paul said of Mark, *Bring him, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.* Are you in the conflict for

salvation as a Mark? Maybe once upon a time you didn't concern yourself much with the Gospel, or church, or the need to avoid temptation. When someone tapped you on the shoulder to help out or give an offering you ran the other way. You avoided the topic of spiritual things at home or anywhere else. But now God has given you a more mature perspective to recognize how serious the struggle is, the eternal ramifications and the purpose for which God put you here so that you are fully invested in this. Could someone say that like Mark you are now useful to the cause of the Gospel?

Or are you a Demas? Someone who avoided the conflict altogether. Paul wrote, *Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.* Is church basically a just place to get married and buried? Is your greater endeavor simply to get by, hold on to what's yours, be left alone and have a good time as much as you are able? In other words, have you stepped out of the conflict like Demas?

To one degree or another we each have been a Demas, or maybe in some ways we still are. Our sinful hearts just aren't in it. We hold back because we're naturally resistant to God or maybe we feel guilty and avoid

dealing with it. We are truly lost and condemned creatures on our own, turning our backs on the one who saves us. Here's the alarming news: You can't have the salvation later if you are not in the conflict now.

So let's have a change of heart and back to Christ. He jumped into the ultimate conflict for our sakes, the conflict that won God's forgiveness and our salvation by His sufferings and death on the cross. He forgives you and me even now knowing full well how *not* noble we've been. That's what the Gospel is. Christ's unconditional forgiveness. That's why the Reformation is so important and needs to continue in us –to preserve and proclaim that salvation for us and God-willing for many others.

God the Holy Spirit has promised to sustain, refresh and equip us through that Gospel so that we are up for the struggle. He will work the miraculous change in us so that we may become like Mark, or Luke, or perhaps even like the Apostle Paul. And one day He will deliver us from the conflict as Paul wrote from prison: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.* Though faith in Christ means conflict for us now, it is a conflict for

salvation, which means one day we'll be transported from Church Militant to the Church Triumphant.