

Faith In the Home
Third Sunday of Advent, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, "Waiting with Joy"

For numerous reasons, I loved this time of year growing up. I looked forward to two weeks off from school, traveling to family, or having them come to Reno. There was the food, and the sweets, decorations, and of course the presents. And growing up I also loved the Christmas Eve candlelight service. Christmas is such a special time in our culture that many people who do not believe in Christ's miraculous birth still love celebrating this holiday, even if they completely miss the point of Christmas.

I still love Christmas, but for a deeper reason. I love it because it is our celebration and remembrance that God became man in order to live with us, die for us, and rise for us. The first Christmas (the birth of Christ), fulfilled a promise of God, and Christmas reminds us of another promise. Jesus who once came to us, promised to come again. Just as child waits for Christmas, we can wait with joy and anticipation that Jesus Christ is going to return. In a letter that Paul drafted to the Church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians), Paul tells to them to do just that, to wait for Christ's return with joy.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1Thessalonians 5:16-24)

Now there is a lot to unpack in these verses, but the overall message is summed up well in verse 24, "He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it." Jesus Christ is faithful to us. Yes, while He is a man, He is not just any man. He is the Son of the Living God. He is God, one with the Father, and the Holy Spirit. He died for your sins and rose for you is going to be faithful to bring your salvation to completion. Even as we all struggle with always rejoicing. Even though we are not faithful in praying without ceasing. Even though we do not give thanks in all circumstances, Jesus Christ is full of grace and is faithful to bring us to repentance and to renew us. Therefore, it is not us on our own who can do all these things as we are told to wait with joy, but Jesus gives us the power, the strength, and the ability to do these things.

When the Holy Spirit given to us by God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ helps us to pray instead of curse, and helps us to always rejoice. It gives the ability to give thanks in all circumstances. Joy doesn't mean that we are going be happy or feel elation all the time. But what it does it makes us resilient in the hope that what we go through is not in vain, and the Christ is coming again. He who saved us from our sins is going to fulfill His promise to take us to our eternal home with Him. In the meantime, Jesus will enable to rejoice and give thanks no matter the circumstances.