

## **The End of Time - The Church Militant**

Several Text - Hebrews 9:24–28

Grace and peace from our Victorious Lord Jesus who gives us strength, so we continue our journey towards Heaven, the Church Triumphant.

Today, we continue pondering on the End of Time, how is that going to be like, what do we need to keep in mind, and how do we prepare.

As we started last week, we focused on what happens when we die, celebrating at the same time the departure of our loved ones. Today we shall focus on those left behind, we the Church, here and now. Where we are facing a constant battle against our enemies. This we know as the militant Church. The enemies we are facing and battling constantly are the world, the flesh, and the devil. This is our struggle. This is what the church is constantly fighting against. We are at war with the World, the devil and our flesh, our sinful desires.

This war comes all the way from the garden of Eden. From day one, since the fall, we have been at war with the powers of darkness. From Cain and Abel to Abraham's battles, to the Exodus, to Israel's march in the wilderness, the Canaanite conquest, and David's battles, and on through the rest of Israel's story, we see the war between the seed of the woman and the serpent runs through all of Scripture. It is a battle we fight from the day we are baptized to the moment the Lord calls us home. But this war was won already at the Cross. There Jesus defeated the enemy, defeating the world, and our sinful nature. There Jesus won victory! And his victory is also our victory over. But because we are not in Heaven already, then we still fight this war in this world. It comes with the new state of being a Christian. The apostle Paul said it: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12)

Yes, the devil has been defeated and now awaiting his eternal punishment, but doesn't want to go down alone, so comes to you as roaring lion, as the apostle Peter says: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Pet. 5:8)

The enemy hates God and hates those who follow God. But because the devil can't defeat God, so his battle is fierce against those who follow God. He goes out through his demons using deceiving and tantalizing schemes. The enemy is not happy that we are in Christ. Jesus said: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matt. 10:34) The battle is fierce indeed.

The flesh doesn't like us to have peace either. Paul says: "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin." (Romans 7:14) "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" the apostle James, tells us. (James 4:1)

Sure, we like to blame the world and the devil for wanting to destroy us, but I think that the enemy that is more threatening is within ourselves. It is the flesh. It is hard to fight against ourselves isn't it. This flesh, what allows the world and the devil to

get the best of us but when we submit to Christ then nor world, no devil no flesh will destroy us.

Indeed, we do have three enemies, the world, the flesh and Satan, they are constantly attacking us, so we war against them. But we don't fight alone, we are under the banner of Christ! The Scriptures remind us: "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." (1 John 5:4)

What is the victory that overcomes the world? It is faith! Faith is at the center of our victory in Jesus. It is faith that keeps us steady and immovable, faith is what lifts and prepares us for battle. Hear what Paul says regarding our victory in Christ:

<sup>54</sup> "When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

<sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:54-58)

What keeps us steadfast, immovable and abounding in the work of the Lord, it is faith. Faith is practical, faith gives us the victory over our enemies.

It is by faith indeed that we continue in the battle, and it is by faith that we fight the good fight, either with the world, with ourselves and with Satan. Faith is practical and encouraging.

In our reading this morning we have two examples of this practical faith. One is the example of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17), who at the request of Elijah she baked one last piece of bread for him, for her and her child, because she had just some flour, the last of it, during a severe drought in the land. The devil was indeed working hard in the politics and choices the people of her time were making, and the sins of the leaders, religious and politics, caused a drought in their land. The spiritual soldier who was battling this attacks head on was Elijah, and in today's reading assisted by another spiritual soldier, a widow who seem to have really nothing, yet by faith at the word and command of Elijah there was food for the three of them to live on till the battle was over, and. The second example is from another widow, giving her last penny as an offering (Mark 12). Showing her confidence in God's promised salvation.

But that's exactly it, God's salvation, Jesus' death on the cross and his coming out of the tomb alive are the guarantee enough, the power of, and the strength we receive to battle the enemy. We are the militant church not by our own strength but by the by but the power of Jesus name.

Now, faith is not just an attitude of the mind or the heart, rather it is a gift from God that rests on the work of Christ Jesus. And there is no clearer picture can be given of the certainty of hope in Christ our Savior than in the letter to the Hebrews we heard today, as it tells of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice that not only forgives but takes away all sin and supplies us with newness of life by His life-giving body and blood all our days!

Indeed, God our Father gives us great encouragement that our salvation and deliverance from sin and sorrow is complete because of the forgiveness won for us by the blood of Jesus, the one and only sacrifice for your sin and the source of daily

cleansing, faith, hope, confidence, and love, and that is what wins victory over the enemy.

Faith and trust in our God, who not only gives “exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust” him but has also fulfilled them all in Christ Jesus.

Jesus achieved all of that as he entered “once for all into the holy places” to appear before God in heaven—not with the blood of any animal, but with his very own blood (9:11–12). Now, as our High Priest, and as our High Priest, Christ gives his blood, unlike that of any animal, as it was the law in the Old Testament, in the Divine Service to purify the conscience of the congregation so that they may serve the living God with a good conscience (9:14). That’s how the flesh gets defeated regularly, having a clear conscience, and a clear conscience comes in the forgiveness of our sins.

Now, for those times when the enemy seems to be winning the battle, remember that Christ is the mediator of a new and better covenant, the letter to the Hebrews says, whose “own blood” is the “once for all” sacrifice for sin that has secured an “eternal redemption” (9:12) “so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (9:15). The ultimate sacrifice of God’s own Son, Christ Jesus not only frees us from sin, but also from the world, the flesh and the devil.

We today have the certainty in Christ’s atoning work, comfort in Christ’s cleansing blood (9:25–26), courage and boldness in Christ’s eternal priesthood (9:24), and hope in Christ’s coming again for those who eagerly await him (9:28). And at the Christ’s final appearance will usher in his salvation in all its fullness and death will be no more.

There is nothing to fear then, because our sins have been forgiven. We have a clear conscience, and that the devil hates. So, he pursues the more. But thanks be to God that he has removed our sins. We have been made clean in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus did not just overlook sin but actually removed it; he took it up on himself to remove it, to take it from our shoulders.

Since we do have then that certainty that our sins have been forgiven, since we have the promise that Christ has conquered death, and his victory is ours, then even in the midst of battle, we can serve God and one another. We can love God and one another because his victory is ours. There is no longer an obstacle to love. There is no obstacle to serve God and abide in his word. We are free indeed, and as soldiers the victory is ours in Christ our Lord. And as soldiers we dress up for battle.

This is our battlefield, we are targeted and assaulted, but we respond in faith, and because of Christ we can come against all of that as David came against Goliath: “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” (1 Sam. 17:45)

Our fight once again, Paul reminds us is not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, therefore we must respond also with God’s power. He is our Victory. And in faith we put on the armour of God. “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” (Eph 6:11) Paul says.

And once all this battle is done, either the Lord calls us home first, or when he comes again, we will be able to say with Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Friends in Christ, our eternal redemption has been won, purchased, paid for in full by the perfect blood of Jesus. The work is complete! Our salvation and final rest in Jesus is as sure and certain as the sun setting today and rising tomorrow! Come what may today or tomorrow, you belong to Christ, and your great High Priest will see you through this life till he comes again in glory to bring you and all his militant saints into the fullness of his eternal inheritance. Amen.