

Victory

Mark 16:14-20; Ephesians 1:3-14

Sunday, July 21, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction:

The Remains of the Day

There's a movie, set in the 1930's, starring Anthony Hopkins as the very professional and completely devoted butler to a Lord Darlington. Convinced that service to a great man is a route to greatness for himself, the butler, named James, ignores the Lord's Nazi sympathies and the needs of his family and friends to be the best butler possible. In the end, he finds that Lord Darlington wasn't such a great man after all, and he has lost his chance at family and at love and must figure out what to do with the "remains of the day" as he realizes that he has wasted much of his life. In these passages about "signs" and "guarantees" I think we find that meaning of what is a good life in the eyes of Christ, and that we can know, in the here and now, that we are on the path that does not lead to waste and despair, and that is the point to these signs.

Scripture is filled with people who lived victorious lives.

Scripture is filled with people who were victorious in life, who did not waste their years regardless of the circumstances. There was Stephen, the first martyr, those in the Book of Revelation who overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. Paul, who fought the good fight and ran the race, and Jesus, who came that we might live abundantly, that is, to live such a life that we could look back on it and find it was worth it all.

- Main Point: The Spirit does not promise an easy course but offers what we need to be victorious in life. There's two words in two passages that I'd like to comment today.

Ephesians-guarantee

The first is in Ephesians 1 one, that wonderful passage that serves as an excellent outline for us to use as we pray for each other. Verse 14 tells us that the Holy Spirit resides in the Christian as a guarantee, literally a down payment of heaven. The Person who can cause us to want what is good and then follow through by doing what is good is our teacher and guide (Philippians 2). We have what we need to be someone who overcomes in life. The word for "guarantee" is used only two other times in the New Testament. The first is in 2 Corinthians 1:22 in which the conviction that God makes promises and is true to them is a sign of the Holy Spirit is present (Cf. Hebrews 11:6). The other time is in 2 Corinthians 5:5, where the presence of the Holy Spirit engenders a yearning for eternity. He will guide the Christian in his path toward heaven and his life will not be wasted.

Mark-signs, the Christian is marked by the Holy Spirit for holy use, and that Spirit can and will, set the Christian on a course that is victorious in life.

At the end of Mark's Gospel there is a passage about the signs that accompany the Christian, sort of how the presence of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee is a "sign." There is some controversy about the different signs mentioned, though I take the position that all of them are still in force. But for now, let's look at the word for "sign." At its root it means to "leave a mark," that the sign is a mark for the presence and activity of God. The wise men, in the Christmas story, were told to look for a

little baby in a manger as a sign (Luke 1:22). A sign is a mark on the Christian involving the plan of God, and that the Christian is set aside for holy use. You were not meant to lose the day or waste your life. You can resist the leading of the Holy Spirit, but those who follow will end up like Paul, saying that they have fought the good fight, they have run the race.

- Application: run with desperate confidence

The Holy Spirit "marks" us and serves as the guarantee of the Christian's inheritance. This life, if all is lived as being done for Christ, cannot be wasted, for even a life of humble service is infused with the presence of the Holy Spirit, so we live desperately, yet with confidence. Theodore Roosevelt once gave a speech in Paris, 1910. Not that long before World War 1. To me, he makes the case that the Christian is to be "out in the arena." This is what he said:

*"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually **in the arena**, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."*

—Theodore Roosevelt

Speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910

- Conclusion

Victory in life is not fame or fortune nor is it the stuff that makes for good biographies. Victory in life is the abundant life, in which you will look back on it when you reach the end and say that it was worth it all. Victory in life has little to do with circumstance, and everything to do with faith and following the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of heaven and the one who marks the Christian and oversees his life. Focus not on what opportunities you have, but what you did with what you have and run the race trusting that the Spirit will guide you.