

## *Rescued by the Living Lord*

✠ **from the hard fought fight (vv.6-8)**

✠ **for glory in His heavenly kingdom (vv.16-18)**

In the name of Jesus, our **Living Lord** and Savior, dear fellow witnesses of His **glory**:

Guess what! This very day, April 18, 1910, what the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* (4/11/2010) calls “100 Years of Glory,” began with the opening of the St. Paul Hotel. Along with Minnesota Governor Adolph O. Eberhart and Archbishop John Ireland was the great railroad tycoon James J. Hill. He owned North Oaks as the family farm. Lawrence Welk got his start in 1937. John F. Kennedy campaigned in 1960, with 500 in the Continental Room and 17,000 supporters outside. The three Waterford crystal chandeliers still hang in the lobby, but prices have changed. In 1910, one person \$2-4; now \$159-799. Presidents like Teddy Roosevelt, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton stayed at the St. Paul Hotel. In 1947, so did Gene Autry and Champion his horse. “100 Years of Glory” – and on the backside of the paper, the Obituaries. A few local doctors, but mostly people like us who would have stood outside as Kennedy spoke. Looks like no convicts are listed; Paul would have been left out. Why does he feel no shame in our text?

✠ **from the hard fought fight (vv.6-8)**

About 35 years earlier in today’s First Lesson Paul was not happy. Then he was called Saul of Tarsus, but seemed more like Joseph Stalin or Adolph Hitler in the 1930’s. If Saul had been able to kill a few million Christians, he would have done it. To arrest Christian men and women in Damascus Saul travelled 150 miles probably on foot for nearly a week. How does a flaming persecutor become the Lord’s chosen missionary to the Gentiles, whom we know as Saint Paul the Apostle? Easter did it. Or at least the Lord of Easter. Once the Lord Jesus convinced Saul that He was risen indeed, Saul-turned-Paul spent the rest of his life celebrating how he was **Rescued by the Living Lord**. Paul’s quiet confidence in his second letter to Timothy is a miracle. He anticipates rescue **from the hard fought fight**.

Paul was in prison four or five years earlier at the end of Acts. But that was house arrest with friends like Dr. Luke and Timothy taking care of his needs. Not this time. Now Nero is Emperor with a vendetta against Christians to blame them in the media for his failed policies. Nero has not yet fiddled while Rome burned, but it may be only a few weeks before he executes both Peter and Paul. According to tradition they were kept in a stinking dungeon called the Mamertine. Paul knows his time is near.

We could get a sense of what he says here if I dumped the full collection plates on the altar, poured my water around, then lit the pile on fire. Everyone would gasp, but what Paul writes is much more. He says, **“I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.”** Far away in Ephesus, Pastor Timothy needs encouragement at the loss of his friend and mentor. What Paul tells him helps our disappointments too: **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** It’s not how you start the race, but how you finish that counts.

Years ago a young family got a good start when they asked us to baptize their twins. But when I visited the mom near the birth of their next child, she coldly told me, “I like my life the way it is.” Translation: “Please leave me alone.” How many of our friends and neighbors want to keep Jesus at arm’s length? Even churchmen will sometimes cheer their pastors and leaders to give up time and treasure or their own freedom. But personal sacrifice and public commitment? That’s too close for comfort. You may find them in church now and then, but would they suffer prison and death for Christ? Would I? Or is this just an interesting story to preach as we marvel at the faith of another apostle?

At Confirmation most of us swore to obey the Lord in Revelation 2:10: ***“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*** Jesus says to every man, woman and child: ***“Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*** (Luke 14:27 NIV) Jesus keeps it simple: ***“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*** (Matthew 10:32f NIV) The Christian life is a **hard fought fight**.

God’s grace so impressed Paul that he kept telling Timothy in his first letter, ***“Fight the good fight of faith.”*** (1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12) On his way to Jerusalem and the first captivity, Paul told the Ephesian elders at Miletus, ***“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”*** (Acts 20:24 NIV) Paul urged the elders to fight the same way by guarding God’s people against savage wolves in sheep’s clothing who would attack their own congregation. For Paul the **hard fought fight** was nearly over. It was as if Departure stood at his prison door with a ticket to sail far, far away. Paul sees heaven so clearly: ***“Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.”*** Did you hear that? This reward of grace is for all who love the Lord’s appearing....

### ✠ for glory in His heavenly kingdom (vv.16-18)

**Glory** is hidden under Paul’s cross just as Christ hid His **glory** under the cross. ***“At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.”*** Remember how Jesus’ disciples forsook Him and fled? Left Him alone to suffer shame, beatings, death? None of the thousands He helped and healed lifted a finger for Jesus. Paul echoed our Lord’s response: ***“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”*** (Luke 23:34 KJV)

Do you children always ask God to forgive your friends when they’re mean to you? Or are you mean back? Dear Christian with the hurting heart, can you look back on your most painful memories and ask God to forgive them? Jesus taught us to pray: ***“Our Father,...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”*** God’s **glory** has a warning label: ***“If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*** But there is also this promise: ***“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”*** (Matthew 6:15,14 NIV)

That’s what’s so amazing about God’s grace. He erased the endless video of our sin all the way back to conception. What others owe us, even a lifetime of abuse, looks like a grain of sand compared to the whole seashore of guilt that God hung on the cross with His Son. Satisfied justice raised Jesus from the dead. Look through God’s monitor. Do a Google search for the worst sins of your life. No results. All deleted. Written over by the blood of Christ. God would rather comfort, guide and bless us like Paul: ***“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. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.”*** Focused on his mission to spread the Good News, Paul overcome all in Christ.

A former Muslim brother named Jacob fled his Iraqi hometown from Saddam Hussein’s troops aiming their tanks at a hillside where several thousand Kurds were trying to escape. Jacob remembered children in his neighborhood who told him about the God who rescues those who ask him. So Jacob prayed, and a cloud covered the mountain. God rescued Jacob again later when border guards searching his backpack found his fake ID instead of the real one. The miracle of being **Rescued by the Living Lord** really shines as this life ends. Paul, Jacob and all of us can say with quiet contentment: ***“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”*** God’s glory is not in hotels full of the high and mighty, but in lowly hearts longing **for glory in His heavenly kingdom**. In life and in death, ***“To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”***