

Matthew 16:18; Rom. 8:31-39; Victory in Jesus I. The Promise of Victory II. The Source of Victory III. The Identity of the Victorious

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is your view concerning the future? When you talk to others about the future, what do you say? How do you speak? Well, if you are like me, you may tend to be rather somber. It is easy to be pessimistic about the future. The fact is, our world is getting worse. There is no morality in the city square. Corruption and perversion is found both within and outside of the church. Violence stalks the streets- and the godly are not immune. If you listen to any conservative podcasts, you will quickly find out about the hypocrisy in politics and the anarchy in society. Truthfully, I can get a little pessimistic about the future of our country as well. There is not a lot of good news out there. But that is why we need to remember our identity and our future! When focus on Jesus and what He is doing, we can be greatly encouraged! This passage from Matthew is going to refocus us on the victory that we have in Jesus Christ! Although our country may be devolving into conflict and chaos, the church is promised victory in Jesus! So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ promises complete victory for His people over their enemies.

I. The Promise of Victory

In our first point, we consider this promise of victory that Jesus gives in our passage. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church. To start off, we need to see what these gates of hell are. As it has often been described, the gates of a city were the place where planning and council takes place. The city gates served as both the courtroom and war room. Gates are essential for security and power. Gates, like their counterparts of the wall, were used for both keeping bad guys out- but also keeping others in. This point is illustrated by the Berlin Wall- it was used to keep certain people out- but more important- it was used for keeping others in. When the gates were shut, there was no escape! You can think of Samson who was faced with the shut gates of Gaza in Judges 16. Closed gates were supposed to keep Samson in, making him their captive. Now this is important to remember- the twofold use of gates- not only to keep people out but to keep others in! When Jesus speaks of gates in Matthew 16, he speaks of the gates of hell. Now in our day, the “gates of hell” is a rather common way of referring to natural gas crater found in central Asia. It is hole in the earth that releases flammable gas which burns night and day. There are other natural locations on earth that have been likened to the the gates of hell- usually some other worldly place of pits and fire. But was Jesus referring to an actual

location when He speaks of the gates of hell? Is there an actual location that serves as the entrance to the world below? Or is he speaking of death in general? The gates of hell are likened to the cords of death. Even Job speaks of these gates- the gates of death in Job 38 and gates of Sheol in Isaiah 38. Hell in our mind tends to be place where Satan and His angels dwell. The realm of the damned where there is no escape. However, hell, hades or sheol can also be used as a shorthand way of speaking about the realm of the dead- what we would call the grave. Instead of imaging that the church is going to march down to hell and attack the walls of hades as some have interpreted this verse to say, Jesus is making a much more simple but no less profound declaration! Jesus is declaring war on death itself! Jesus is going to build His church in spite of hell's resistance- and Jesus will resurrect His people in spite of death's reluctance! In declaring victory over the gates of hell, Jesus is making is clear that His church will not be defeated by sin, death and hell. This is most clearly seen in His future work of raising the dead from the depths of the earth. Jesus is really making a resurrection promise here- those who die in the Lord are not lost! The gate of hell will will not stop him from resurrecting His people- body and soul. The bars of the grave will not be able to withstand His gathering- this last foe will not be able to silence His call! Jesus is declaring war on death- and he promises that He will have the victory! Those who are united to Him will not be stuck in the realm of the dead- they will be delivered from its icy grasp- being resurrected in both body and soul on that last day!

Think back again about this promise- the church will be built! The lost will not only be gathered, but they will be kept and ultimately delivered! None can snatch out of His hand- not one lost sheep will be left behind. And the victory promised is uncontested! Death cannot remove them from Jesus' hand- nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus! Not even death. Death will not prevail- the grave will not conquer- the tomb will not withstand and the crypt cannot withhold its subjects. Just as Jesus experience- the stone being rolled away- death no longer is the stronger! Even in Jonah's prayer we catch a glimpse of this- the waters closed over me to take my life, the bars closed upon me forever, yet you brought up my life from the pit! So the gates of hell have been broken, and death will not prevail against the church.

II. The Source of Victory

But this victory is only possible because this enemy has been defeated. As Jesus said, I will build my church. When we confess in LD 21 we state that Jesus gathers, protects and preserves for Himself a community

chosen to eternal life. So in our passage Jesus makes it clear- I will have my church! A king must have his citizens- the head must save His body. Not only is Christ the author and perfecter of our faith, He is also the builder and architect of the church. So the source of the victory that we have over the gates of hell is found in the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ. Jesus defeated Satan- in that Satan fell like lightning. Jesus resisted temptation and was faithful to end- remaining without sin and thus Satan has no power over him. Added to this, Jesus rose from the grave after 3 days. Being the Lord of Life means that Jesus has life in himself- and he can give eternal life to those whom He chooses. He is the resurrection and the life- and as John 14 puts it, because He lives you also will live. So Jesus will gather- He will build and protect His church- and the church will be built because Jesus is the one who does it! This is an important reminder. The church will not go down to defeat- she will not be overrun by her enemies- she will not fail in her mission because Jesus is doing the work of building. Added to this, the members of the church can be of good cheer as we will see in our next point, because Jesus is building! These members will not be lost- they will not be forgotten in the grave- they will be brought to the end and goal of their faith- because Jesus is building! None can separate and none can snatch out of His hand. It is so very important to remember who is building the church- for it is in this builder that we find our comfort. If Jesus will secure the number of the elect- it will be done! And if those loved are to be protected until they arrive at their eternal home- it will be done! The church is the only thing that Jesus is said to build. He loves His bride! As useful and necessary as the earthly kingdoms are- these will all fall! At the end of Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Dan. 2, only one kingdom stood! All the others fell and were reduced to dust- only the mountain of Jesus stood! This too is a good reminder. As much as we can get frustrated and grow tired of all the politics around us- at the end of the day these all will fall! Or as Psalm 2 warns, each of these rulers must kiss the Son or they will be terrified by His wrath! So the victory of Jesus- His right of rule is certain and absolute. As Eph. 1 puts it, And He put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church. Or as Acts 2 illustrates, Jesus added to their number every day those who were being saved! Our ultimate hope has never been in the rulers of the world, but rather in Jesus who is building His church! This world may be falling apart when it comes to what we see- but the truth is, the lasting and permanent kingdom is being established and is coming! This is not to minimize suffering, but to rather maximize the glory and blessings that are coming!

III. The Identity of the Victorious

Moving on, in our final point we are going to focus in on the identity of the victorious- or more specifically- how those who are victorious should live and act. Since the work of Jesus must be completed- and the victory secured is one that covers both our body and our soul in life and in death- what kind of people ought we to be? As Rom. 8 so clearly states- if God is for us, who can be against us? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us! The church is not limping to the finish line- she is racing- charging- running the race! The flame of the church will not flicker- only to soon die out! She burns like the sun or shines like a city on the hill! God has not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self control! Knowing that Jesus has won the victory- that He is winning- that the defeat of the last enemy is certain- this is good news that empowers and emboldens us! We can be strong and courageous- right?! As you know, this is a real challenge. If we base our thinking on what we see, the prognosis is not good. But if we cling to what the Scriptures say- we can be bold- to be of good cheer! Yes, Satan is waging war against Christ's people- but Christ will build His church! The army of darkness will not win the day! Yes, death is the last enemy and it looms large in our sight- but the gates of hell will not overcome! The grave cannot hold its prey! Yes, our world is growing immoral- but Jesus is building His church!

To conclude, our society is displaying the marks of the end times. Suppression of the truth and a rebellious spirit is all around us. In many ways, there is a hellish sent in the air. Proud, abusive, rebellious. The forces of darkness gathering to wage war against the people of Christ! It is understandable to be pessimistic- to think that this world is circling the drain. But we must not forget, Jesus has, is and will build His church! Instead of looking around, we need to look forward- or look up for our good news! When asked about your view of the future, the best answer I have heard a person give is this- I am an optimistic a-mil. Meaning that I believe Jesus is ruling and reigning now- He has and will build His church- and the victory over sin, death and hell is secure! Jesus Christ promises complete victory for His people over their enemies.