

Take hold of eternal life! 1 Timothy 6:11-16
19th Sunday after Pentecost 10/10/2004 Pastor Jon Bergemann

Come Holy Spirit, renew our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love! Amen. The word of God for our consideration this morning is found in 1 Timothy chapter 6 (read text). In the name of our triumphant Savior, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

The other afternoon as I was walking to my car in the school parking lot, I had to pause for a moment and try to take in the beautiful weather. As the sun shone brightly from a brilliant blue sky on an awesome autumn day, I thought to myself, "This weather is heavenly!"

And then I caught myself, and forced myself to think about this question: "Is my concept of heaven so little, so small, that I can capture what heaven is like with the thought of good weather?! Is my conception of heaven that small? That lowly?"

What do you and I think about when we contemplate heaven? What will it be like? What will make it "heavenly"? These are questions God urges us to contemplate in our text today. But first He wants us to know the situation we are in right now.

We are in a spiritual fight, a spiritual war. The devil wants to rip away your faith. He wants to demoralize you and depress you and defeat you into thinking that your pains and pressures are too great to overcome, and that your God doesn't really care. The world wants to undermine your beliefs and values. And your own sinful nature wants to plunge into a pit of selfishness, self-pity, laziness and greed, and try to get away from God. These enemies are warring against us every day. The fight is on, and we need to stand against them.

So what are we told to do? Hunker down, because it's going to be really really hard? Bury our heads in the sand, and wait for the storm to pass? Cower in a corner? Try to muster whatever courage we can and hope we are strong enough to endure on our own? No!!!

Look again at our text. Verse 12 tells us to "**Fight the good fight of faith.**" And then what? Fight and cry for our mommies? Fight and scream for help? Fight and hope that it comes out alright? No! Fight and "**Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.**"

Our God urges us this morning to take hold of eternal life in the midst of our fight. What does he mean by that? That we should try to die today and be in heaven? No. When He tells us to "**take hold of eternal life**" He's telling us to claim it as our own, to meditate on what it means that we will live forever, to confidently look toward the life to come – to ponder our eternal fortune in order to give our hearts joy and motivation during our earthly fight. Take hold of eternal life – think about what it will be like, know where you are going, and frame your whole lives not in terms of what will happen to you in this life, but rather in the one to come. This is what our God is telling us to do! This is what it means to take hold of eternal life!

But, if we honestly evaluate ourselves, how often don't we have to admit that we haven't always "taken hold" of our eternal lives, haven't always lived with one eye on heaven? Indeed, how often haven't we been far more centered on the here and now? How limited our thoughts have been to this world!

Think about it. How quickly don't we fall into the idea of measuring how much God loves us by how "well" we're doing in this world? For example – if my relative who's ill gets better, we rejoice. But what if they get worse? Do we rejoice then? After all, perhaps the very best thing for my relative's eternity is if that relative gets worse, not better. Isn't God smart enough to know? And what if my relative who believes in Jesus dies? Do we rejoice? If not, why not? After all, what could possibly be better for that person than that they've been taken to their eternal rest? What could possibly be better for them than that they receive their glorious, glorified body? So if you think about it, wouldn't it make MORE sense that you and I would mourn if our loved one gets well and rejoice if they die?! Sounds wacky doesn't it?

But you know why it sounds wacky? It sounds wacky because our thinking process is WAAAAYYYY too centered and directed by the thoughts of this world. Our thought process is way too confined to the things of this world, is bordered by the events of this world and the limitations of this world.

And think of the ramifications. If the OTHER world really were most important for you and for me, if we really did always take hold of eternal life, wouldn't we be pouring every bit of effort that we could possibly pour into eternal matters? If eternal matters really were most important for us, wouldn't we be absolutely pouring ourselves into the Word of God? If eternal matters were really most important to us, would we not be eagerly, excitedly, regularly telling others about Jesus? After all, there's nothing more important, right? Is that the mark of your life? Or not? In fact, should not those eternal, spiritual matters be far more important than your job? Or your family? Or your friends? Or your hobbies? After all, spiritual matters are eternal, those other things are not. So wouldn't it make sense that we'd weigh the spiritual as more important? Wouldn't it make sense that we would take hold of eternal life? Of course! Is that the mark of your life?

How often we get caught up in the here and now and forget about the hereafter. How often our thoughts are waaayyy too centered on and directed by the thoughts of this world. How often we fail to even think about our eternal lives much less take hold of our eternal lives as we struggle to get a grip on our earthly lives. How right God would be to readjust our misguided focus. How right He would be to become fed up by us who question His ways and ignore the blessings He has for us in heaven.

Thankfully, though, God does not think in the way that we do. God does not repay in the way this world does. How do we know? Because He looked at us, who so often fail to take hold of eternal life, and took hold of us. He saved us. And He lovingly redirects our eyes to the eternal life he has given us.

How? Look at verse 13. Paul encourages us to remember **“Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.”** Why was Jesus testifying before a man named Pontius Pilate? Because He was on trial. Because He was about to be sentenced to death on a cross. Because on that cross He would forget about the agony of hell that He was suffering and keep His focus on eternal life – our eternal life. You see, God sent His own son, Jesus, to live a life with a perfect eternal focus in your place. Then Jesus kept His focus and died on the cross to pay for our sins. Finally, He rose from the dead to guarantee that we are forgiven. Meaning what?

We have a whole new life! God sees Jesus perfect life in place of our sins. In the eyes of God we look perfect! We have a whole new life now, and an eternal life waiting for us after this life!

Think about that! We know who we are: forgiven children of God. And we know exactly where we are going to spend eternity: in paradise with our loving God. We know how all our earthly struggles will end: we will dwell in glory, in victory in heaven. We know the outcome of the battle already! Again, think about that. If a soldier knew the outcome of a battle, do you think he would be pretty confident going into the fight? If he knew that no matter what happened, he would emerge victorious, do you think he would fight with zeal? With confidence? I think so.

That's how you and I can fight our fight of faith. We might feel guilt and pain when we look at all our sinful failings of the past and present. But remember: Jesus forgives us! He gives us eternal life! We know how our battle ends: we are going to heaven! Keep fighting! Take hold of eternal life!

We are assailed by pressures and worries in this life. What will next week bring, or next month, or next year? We don't know the details of every battle that we will fight, but we know how it all ends! Those pressures and worries and uncertainties will be no more when we stand victorious in heaven! Keep fighting! Take hold of eternal life!

And we experience heartache as we lose loved ones and face death ourselves. But we know how it ends! God will take His children home to heaven! To eternal joy! This life is not the end! We will be reunited in heaven! Keep fighting! Take hold of eternal life!

And we experience frustrations when we hit road bumps in our jobs or careers, or when our ministry doesn't seem to be moving forward as fast as we would like. But we know how it ends! We are going to heaven! Keep fighting! Take hold of eternal life!

And at times, will you feel like giving up? Yes. And will you feel like caving in? Yes. Will you fall down in the fight? Yes. Will you feel overwhelmed in the fight? Yes. But at those times, when you feel like you can't fight anymore, take a timeout. Still your thoughts, remember where you are going – to eternal life – and remember who is going to be fighting with you and for you every step of the way: your holy, loving God. Did you forget what He is like? He reminds you at the end of our text. As verses 15 and 16 tell us, our God is **“the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.”**

That's the God that is fighting for you! He's more powerful than you can ever comprehend! He's so glorious that no one can even bear to gaze directly at His majesty! He is the King! He is the Ruler! And He is the One who loves you more than you can ever imagine.

And He's not tired. He's not weary. He's not nervous. He's not scared. Instead, He's in complete control and will take you home to live in eternal glory with Him! At the end of this blink of a life, at the end of our fleeting earthly fight, He will stand with you victorious in the gates of heaven! And never again will your stomach feel the pain of nervousness, never again will your eyes pour the pain of a tear, never again will your ears hear the sound of bad news, never again will your eyes see the suffering of sin, never again will your hands clench in anger, stress or guilt, never again will your back be tired from the burdens of this world. Instead you will stand in peace, in glory, in inexpressible joy, in heaven!

You know the result of your battle! You know the end of your fight! So don't give up! Keep fighting! You know how it all ends! Take hold of the eternal life that your God has given you! It's heavenly! Amen.