

An Eye Toward the Future

2 Thessalonians

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Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12
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Would you take your Bibles and let's turn for just a few minutes to the New Testament book of 2 Thessalonians 1. If you're using one of the Bibles at the bottom of the chair in front of you that we provide, you can turn to page 989 and we're looking for 2 Thessalonians 1 and we'll be reading verses 5 through 12. 2 Thessalonians 1, beginning at verse 5.

5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering-- 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. 11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is God's word.

Let me pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. Heaven and earth will pass away but your word will remain forever. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would take the word that is light to our feet, a lamp unto our path, and illuminate our hearts today and help us to marvel at Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

I was reading this week about a wife and mother who described a certain level of excitement between Thanksgiving and Christmas and most of you know that excitement,

you know when Thanksgiving comes, then you know Christmas is right around the corner and you begin to get excited. And this mother/wife said this, she said, "This was my yearly ritual until suffering hit." Deaths in the family, their marriage was going through a rough time, her husband was in the middle of a career change and they they received a shocking medical diagnosis, and all of this prevented her from celebrating the holidays she said, like she used to. Many of you here today, some of you perhaps can relate to this. You no longer celebrate the holidays like you used to. She went on to say this, "Looking back, I can see how suffering unveiled my eyes and enabled me to celebrate the holiday's truest meaning."

When I read that, I thought about the letter that we're looking at. The Apostle Paul was writing to believers who were suffering. We've been looking at these verses over the last few weeks and you'll remember back in verse 4 they were experiencing persecution, afflictions of all sorts, suffering in general, and in many ways life was not what it used to be for them. So when Paul wrote this letter, he wrote to first and foremost encourage them and the specific way that we see that he did this was by pointing them to the future coming of Jesus Christ. That's really at the heart of what we're reading here in this letter, the first part of it. He's encouraging these suffering believers that during their time of affliction, during their time of suffering to keep an eye toward the Second Advent, the Second Coming of Jesus.

Last year about this time, I had had a pulmonary embolism and I was having some severe headaches and the doctor said, "I want you to go and have an MRI." Well, I had an MRI back about 16 years ago and it was not a good experience. They asked me, they said, "Are you claustrophobic?" I said, "No, no way." They slid me in that tube and I found out I was claustrophobic alright. They kept me in there 30 minutes and then they pulled me out and they put me back in for 45 minutes and I'll tell you what, I was about to come unglued. I thought all kinds of thoughts, you know. But when you're in a steel tube like a sausage, you know, there is not a whole lot you can do but I wanted to crawl out of that thing backwards.

Well, then last year they said, and so when they asked me, "Are you claustrophobic?" I said, "Yes, I am." And so I said, "Can I do an open MRI?" So got in the open one and I was so messed up I couldn't handle it. I mean, I was in so much pain, psychologically I was just out of it about a year ago and I was in there 10 minutes and I said, "I've got to come out," and I got out and I wept like a baby. I cried. It messed me up so bad. Then they said, "Well, you don't have to do this." So about two weeks later I came back and they had helped me, they had said, "We're going to give you some music to listen to," and this and that, some things to help me, but the one thing I remember, the one thing that helped me endure among numerous things they did to help me, the one thing that helped me endure was an eye toward the future, and what I mean by that is this: my time, I knew that my time in that steel tube was limited. I knew I wasn't going to be in there forever and I knew that I was going to be able to get out and find some relief and I was going to be able to go to lunch with my best friend, Katherine, and I thought, you know, as we face our own spiritual MRIs, you might say, it's important that God's people keep an eye toward the relief that we're going to experience at the Second Coming of Jesus.

There are three things in this passage that radiate to me in ways that Paul describes what the Second Coming of Jesus is going to be like. It's Jesus revealed, Jesus glorified, and Jesus marveled at. So those three things I want us to look at this morning.

The first is Jesus revealed. In verse 7, Paul writes, "and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." Now, first, Paul was talking about a real event that is coming in the future, the revealing of the Lord Jesus from heaven. Notice it's not San Diego. It's not Topeka. It's not Lebanon Junction. It's from heaven. Why heaven, though? That's really important. Well, you'll remember in the book of Acts, and you'll see these passages, in the book of Acts, Jesus had ascended up into heaven. You remember his ascension and it says, "And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'" When Jesus is revealed, he is revealed from heaven. In other words, where is Jesus now? Jesus is in heaven. He is seated, we know from Scripture, at the right hand of the Father. So Jesus will be revealed from heaven and it says he will be with his mighty angels and what that means is angels that belong to his power. They're going to do, the angels are going to do the Lord Jesus' bidding when he comes again.

But it says that he will be revealed and that's an interesting word. He'll be revealed from heaven. Jesus revealed, what does it mean? Well, the word means uncovering what is hidden; or it means the unveiling. Now I know that most of you, I know how you are, you've been wondering, "What's on that table up there? What is Brother Van hiding on the table?" It's nothing exciting, I promise you. I promise you, nothing exciting at all. It's just something I grabbed this morning and covered up with a sheet to show you what the word "reveal" means. It's the unveiling. I'm revealing right now Jeff's saxophone. You see, I told you it was no big deal. Revealed. Now it was there, right? It was there, you just didn't know, but it's been shown now for what it is, and that's what the word "revealed" means here. You see, for now, for now the Lord is hid from the view of the world. For now, but according to Scripture he will be revealed. He'll be unveiled.

Now I thought about this, this week, and I thought, for some our Lord's hiddenness is actually an obstacle to belief. In other words there are people who say, "Well, if I could just see, I'd believe." So I want you to watch a video clip for about a minute and it will just illustrate the point that I'm speaking of.

Video clip:

Speaker: Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man living in the sky who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of 10 things he does not want you to do, and if you do any of these 10 things, he has a special place full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever until the end of time. But he loves you.

Some say it this way, they say if faith is so important to God, if he so badly wants us to believe in him, why doesn't he just show himself? Why does he remain hidden? I'd believe if he would just reveal himself.

I heard it put this way some years ago and maybe this will help because I think this is a good answer. Let's say that I'm driving down the road and I'm driving the way I want to drive today. I have no regard for the traffic laws. I'm going to drive as fast as I'd like to drive. I'm going to perhaps ignore the stop signs. I might stop, I might not, because I'm driving the way I want to. But then I look in my rearview mirror and Chief Roy is behind me. All of a sudden, I begin driving differently, right? Now the question is: did I all of a sudden fall in love with the traffic laws? Did I all of a sudden say, "I love driving 35 miles an hour down the road." It feels like I'm sitting still. Have I fallen in love with the traffic laws? No, I have not, right? What have I done? I have demonstrated behavior modification because of the overwhelming presence of Chief Roy, you see?

My point is this: you see, perhaps God doesn't overwhelm us with showing himself because he's looking for more than behavior modification. In other words, perhaps he's looking for faith, commitment, and genuine obedience from our heart. Perhaps that's why that he's not all about overwhelming us with his presence, but regardless on this day that we're reading of, on this day Jesus will be revealed in all his glory and we'll be shown, we'll be shown what and who he is.

So Jesus revealed from heaven, but then there is, secondly, Paul mentions Jesus glorified. Look at verse 10 with me, "when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints." To be glorified in his saints. Now, first, what we're looking at here is Paul encouraging suffering believers, pointing them to the Second Coming of Jesus, and it says he's going to be revealed, we're going to see him for who and what he is, but then he's going to be glorified in us. Now, you see, some may think that at his coming that the Lord is just going to be preoccupied with dealing with the wicked, and actually that's going to happen. In verse 8, did you notice it says when he comes, he's going to come with his mighty angels "in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." Now we looked at these verses last week and I just want to remind you that Jesus is going to be dealing with the wicked and you say, "Okay, well, that's gotta be like Charles Manson and that's going to be Adolf Hitler, people like that." No, I want you to notice who he's going to inflict vengeance upon, those who do not know God. You remember last week we said what that means is, those who do not know God as he has revealed himself in the person of Jesus. In other words, it's not just any God, it's the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has revealed himself to us through the person of Jesus Christ and, secondly, those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So who are the wicked? According to God, they are those who do not know him, they do not have a relationship with him through his Son Jesus Christ and have not obeyed the Gospel of Jesus. In other words, Jesus comes and he has a royal invitation, the King has invited us to come to him to be part of his kingdom. To say no to that is cosmic treason

and as we looked at it last week, it is a criminal offense, and when Jesus comes back, they will be dealt with, but Jesus will not be totally preoccupied with that, that's something else. Something much more is going to take place, he's going to be glorified in his saints.

Friends, this is better than what it sounds like on paper, okay? It doesn't say that he'll be glorified among his saints, he will be, but it says specifically he'll be glorified in his saints. "What do you mean?" Well, let's picture a theater, a theater, a building, a theater building, and a play is going on inside that building. That theater building is not changed by the play that's performed in it, but the play is among, it's among the theater, it's among the people in the theater, but it's not changing the theater. That's why Paul says that Jesus will be glorified not among but in his saints.

Maybe this picture will help. I think it was John Stott who gave this example. It's a picture of a light bulb, of course, and inside that light bulb is what's called a filament, those little wires, it's a filament, and the filament glows with light and heat when the electric current passes through it and it's changed. Understand? What I mean is this: we will not only see the splendor, the magnificence, the glory of Jesus, we'll not only see it, we will share his glory. That's what it means, you see. He'll be glorified in his saints. It's not just something we're going to sit back as spectators and go, "Wow, isn't that great! That's amazing!" No, we are going to share his glory and be radically and permanently changed into his likeness. Wow.

You say, "Yeah, but it says he'll be glorified in his saints." I was with a brother the other day, he's a Christian brother and he said this, he said, "You know, I still have trouble seeing myself as a saint." And perhaps all of us struggle with that at times. You look in the mirror, you know, "I don't look a whole lot like a saint. I didn't act a whole lot like a saint this week." We have trouble believing we're a saint. But you notice here in verse 10 it said when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints "and to be marveled at among all who have believed." Now what does that mean? Well, it means this: saints and believers are the same people. All believers are saints. Let me say it this way: in God's way of seeing reality and God only sees reality, all believers are saints. You see, we do not become saints by our actions, by doing some great thing. According to the Scripture, we become saints when the Holy Spirit sets us apart. Now let explain it this way: the word here "saints," the original language is a word that means "set apart." It's "set apart ones," and so when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, when we receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, our Lord, the Holy Spirit takes us – just picture this – he takes us and sets us apart, okay? So we're set apart, now we're saints, okay?

Jerry Bridges years ago helped me to understand this a whole lot better. The US Air Force Academy, he said, let me explain it this way. The US Air Force Academy is different from a typical university. The US Air Force Academy takes young men and women and literally sets them apart. Okay, they set them apart by the US government to become Air Force officers. It costs our government \$300,000 to educate and train each cadet over a four year period. So the Academy does not exist to prepare young people to be school teachers or Wall Street bankers, that's great great things, but it exists for the

one purpose, to prepare officers for the US Air Force and the cadets are set apart for that purpose. Do you understand? He goes on to put it this way: in a similar way to a young person entering the Air Force Academy, every new believer has been set apart by God from their old sinful way of life to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

So in all that you ought to see God's purpose. You see, God's purpose in sending his Son is that we might believe in him, we might receive him, and when we do, we're set apart and God is saying, "I'm going to transform you. I'm going to transform you and you and you into the image of my dear Son Jesus Christ." So when Jesus returns, he'll be revealed from heaven and he will be glorified, we'll share in his glory, all of his saints.

Then there is one other thing that's mentioned about the Second Coming of Jesus and that is Jesus marveled at. Look at verse 10 with me, "when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed." Most of you, I'm sure, are familiar with the actor, Bill Murray. He claimed that there was a work of art that once saved his life. This year in an article he was interviewed for, he talks about a time when he was in Chicago for his first experience as an actor, he said this, "My performance was so bad that I just walked out afterward and onto the street and I kept walking for a couple of hours." He headed for Lake Michigan as he began to contemplate suicide. Here's what he said, "I thought if I'm going to die, I might as well go over toward the lake and float a bit. So I walked toward the lake and reached Michigan Avenue and started walking north and somehow I ended up in front of the Art Institute and walked inside and there was a painting of a simple peasant." You'll see the painting on the overhead here. "A woman working in a field with the sunrise behind her. I always loved that painting. I saw it that night and I said, 'Look, there's a girl without a whole lot of prospects but the sun is coming up and she's got another chance at it.' I said, 'I'm a person too and I will get another chance every single day.'"

This picture is "The Song of a Lark" and Bill Murray said at the lowest time in his life, he looked at it, he admired it, and it inspired him to change. It caused him to change directions in life, but what does it mean that Jesus will be marveled at? What does it mean? Well, I'll tell you this right away, it's more than what Bill Murray did. Bill Murray admired the picture but to marvel is more than to admire.

It's amazing. This word is fascinating. It means this, it's to have your expectations exceeded. Now think about it, in this life how many times do you actually have your expectations exceeded? Most of the time, right, most of the time we seldom see our expectations fulfilled in this broken sinful world. We have certain expectations and things never seem to meet them. It also means this, it's to have your desires exceeded. To marvel means to have your desires exceeded. How many times has that happened in this broken world? Thomas Watson, one of the Puritans, said this, he said the word means it's the overflow of your mind and heart. To marvel, to have your expectations exceeded, your desires exceeded, it's the overflow of your mind and heart.

Did you ever think about that happening, having your expectations exceeded, your desires exceeded? Here's what Paul is saying, listen, when we see Jesus, we will marvel

at him. He will exceed our expectations. You see, right now we probably have certain expectations, "When I see Jesus, it's going to be like this and it's going to be like this." But we're going to marvel at Jesus which means that our experience is going to exceed our expectations. No matter how drilled up we may get now, it's going to be exceeded then. Our desires, when we see him and we marvel, our desires are going to be exceeded. Do you know why? We will marvel at Jesus because of what he has done for us.

In 2015, the city of San Bernardino, CA, you remember there was a tragic shooting. A 27 year old lady by the name of Denise was there that day and her life was spared. It was not because the shooter saw her and decided not to take her life, but it was because of a valiant man by the name of Shannon Johnson. He shielded Denise's body with his own and saved her life. Here's what she said, "Wednesday morning at 10:55 a.m. we were seated next to each other at a table, joking about how we thought the large clock on the wall might be broken because time seemed to be moving so slowly. I would have never guessed that only five minutes later, we would be huddled next to each other under the same table, using a fallen chair as a shield from over 60 rounds of bullets being fired across the room. While I cannot recall every single second that played out that morning, I will always remember his left arm wrapped around me, holding me as close as possible next to him behind that chair. And amidst all the chaos, I'll always remember him saying these three words, 'I got you.'"

When we see Jesus revealed from heaven, when Jesus is glorified in us, and when we see that we would have been punished, verse 8 and 9, he's coming back inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and have not obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, when we see that we would have been punished but that rather Jesus took it for us and at the cross he said, "I got you. I got you," we will then marvel. We will marvel at Jesus.

You say, "Well, look, I believe in a God of love. I don't really believe in that God of verses 8 and 9 who inflicts vengeance, punishment. I don't believe in that. I believe in a God of love." Well then, let me ask you something: if you don't believe in judgment day, then you have no idea what it cost for God to love you. I mean, think about that for a moment. If you say, "I don't like this idea of a God of judgment and wrath and this sort of thing. I don't like that so I don't know if I'm comfortable with it." Well, look, if you don't believe in judgment day, then you have no idea what it cost God to love you. You have no idea what God did to love you. Your idea of God of love is abstract. It's something fuzzy. It's not concrete. It's not real. It's not genuine. Your idea of a God of love is abstract and you'll never be amazed at that. That kind of God will never amaze you. That kind of God, you'll never marvel at that kind of God.

Furthermore, if you don't marvel at him, you'll not be changed because when we marvel at him, that's what brings change. That's what changes our life. That's what changes the course, the direction of our lives. That's why we sing the song, "O, how marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be. O, how marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me." O, how marvelous.

Jesus revealed, Jesus glorified in his saints, Jesus marveled at. But you say, "Preacher, this is future. This is future, what about now?" Quickly look at verse 11 and 12 and let me try to bring this to a close. Paul changes the mode here in this letter, "To this end we always pray for you," now he's talking about now, in other words, in the meantime. Jesus hasn't come yet, in the meantime we pray "that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power." What does this mean, make worthy? We looked at this back in verse 5. This is not about doing something to gain God's favor. "I'll just really try to be a good person. I'll work hard. I'll try to do good things and then God will look at me and he'll show me favor." That's not at all what that means. The only way we're made worthy, accounted worthy is through the only one who is worthy, Jesus Christ. What this means is, it's about now that we know Jesus, and in the meantime we will strive to live a life of holiness. We'll live as people who are set apart.

Also it's about God working in us in order to narrow that gap between what we were when he called us. I remember what I was when he called me and so there's the gap between that and what we are going to be and what we shall be, and God's at work closing that gap down, you see. He began a good work in you, he said, and he'll complete that work until the day of Christ.

Also this verse is about God granting us the power for good deeds, that Jesus said in verse 12, "that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you," that Jesus may be seen and honored in us now. Not just that day but now.

So how does that happen? How will Jesus be glorified in us now? Not just then on that day when he returns but now? I think the answer is this: it is by marveling in Jesus now. It's by marveling at Jesus now. Here's the way Peter put it, it says, "so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Now he's talking about future but now he switches to present, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory." So how do we press on, how do we hold on, how do we maintain, how do we continue to walk with our Lord now until he returns? We continue to marvel at him and what he has done for us.

I had a call this week, a friend of mine, 31 years old. They discovered a mass, large mass in his liver, but the amazing thing about it was they found it incidentally. There was something else. He was having a cough and they were looking at his lungs and when they did the scan, they just accidentally found the mass in his liver. So I pondered on that this week, I thought, you know, it's very likely that today at our 9 AM service, 11 AM service, maybe those listening by radio right now, they might tune in or come today and think, "Yeah, you know, I've got some rough spots. I know I do. I know I've got some rough spots. I know I'm not perfect and I've got some rough spots but I got this. I got this. I can fix all that. I've got this." Well, let me ask you: what if the truth is otherwise? What if there's something far more serious going on in you? I mean, you might come and think, "I know I've got this problem," but what if there's something far more serious? What if

verses 8 and 9 are describing you? What if verses 8 and 9 are actually, that's you? What if that's you? You don't know God through his Son Jesus Christ, you've not obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, what if that's you? Then the truth is you really don't have this. In no sense can you say, "I've got this." No.

I mean, let's take my friend, he received that bad news this week and imagine with me that the doctor and his team walk into the room and they say, "You know, things are pretty bad and without this pill, you're not going to make it. But you know, the problem is this pill, you can't afford it. I mean, the only way you could possibly afford it, you'd have to get rid of your house, all your possessions. You're going to be left with nothing. You're going to be left with nothing material, but if you have this pill, you'll live." Now I can't imagine my friend sitting there saying, "Oh man, I can't part with my boat. Does that mean my gun collection too?" No, don't you imagine he's going to say, "Whatever it takes. Whatever it takes. I want that pill." And do you know what he's going to do? He's going to marvel at that pill. He's going to marvel. It's going to exceed all of his expectations. It's going to exceed his desires.

Friends, what I'm saying is this: if you find yourself in verse 8 and 9, if you find yourself in verse 8 and 9, there is a remedy for this ever so serious condition, it's the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the good news of what he's done for you and for me. So let me ask you as I close: does that make you marvel? It should.