

Please take God's Word and turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1.

The text under consideration this morning is verses 6-10.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in these verses:

“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among

all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.”

Paul and his companions had a special heart for this church.

Partly because their “faith was greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of [them] toward one another [grew] even greater” (v.3).

And also because of their “perseverance and faith in the midst of all [their] persecutions and afflictions” (v.4) which they were enduring.

This was the evidence of “God’s righteous judgment.”

Through the refiners fire and chastening these believers persevered and grew and their faith remain intact.

As we noted last time, suffering is God's will.

In verse 5 we see that one of its purposes is to make us "worthy of the kingdom of God."

But suffering is not all God has in mind for His children.

He also promises "relief" (v.7) as well as "affliction [to] those who afflict you" (v.6).

This again, points to "God's righteous judgment."

Verse 6 says, "For after all it is only just for God to repay..."

God is just.

Isaiah 30:18 says He is a "God of justice."

Paul says this justice is seen in two ways.

First in...

PUNISHMENT FOR THE PERSECUTORS (v.6)

George Williams said, “God’s action in allowing His people to be persecuted, and in permitting the existence of their persecutors, had a double purpose—first, to test the fitness of His people for government (v. 5); and second, to manifest the fitness of their persecutors for judgment.”³¹

Just as God will mete out punishment to the enemies of His people, so He will award rest to those who suffer for His sake.²

³ (1:6) George Williams, *The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 948.

¹ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). 2 Th 1:6.

² William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). 2 Th 1:7.

In Exodus 23:22 when God told Israel to obey the voice of the angel He was sending before them in bringing them into the land of Canaan, He also told them if they obeyed his voice that He would be “an enemy to [their] enemies and an adversary to [their] adversaries.”

It's not different here.

God will “repay with affliction those who afflict you.”

What is the *affliction*?

Verse 9 says, “These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

When will this occur?

Verse 7 says “when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven.”

Verse 10 says, “When He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day.”

He says more about the chronology of this in chapter 2 but suffice it to say that the Lord Jesus is coming back for His saints and to mete our judgment on His enemies.

When He comes for His saints, they will be given “relief” but to those who persecute the saints they will be given “affliction.”

The message of a coming judgment is a unifying theme in Scripture.

In Matthew 3 when John the Baptist was preaching a baptism of repentance we're told

that the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the baptism.

But John said to them in verse 7 when he saw them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

“The wrath to come”?

What is this?

This is a reference to the “Day of the LORD”-- the wrath spoken of in the Old Testament as well as Revelation 8 with the seventh seal.

For example, Ezekiel 7:19 says, “They will fling their silver into the streets and their gold will become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They cannot satisfy their appetite nor can they fill their

stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling.””

Zephaniah 1:18 says, “Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the Lord’s wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.”

Peter refers to this in 2 Peter 3:10 when he says, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”

If you follow, beginning with the sixth seal in the book of Revelation, this is what you see.

Joel 1:15 says, “Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.”

Joel 2:1-2 says, “ Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the Lord is coming; Surely it is near, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations.”

Jesus said in Matthew 24:22, “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

Even in judgment we see the mercy and grace of God.

And throughout this period, we hear God continuing to call the sinner to repentance.

But if sinner refuses to repent, the only thing left is judgment!

There is a horrifying day coming.

This makes our message all the more urgent.

Paul had ended his first letter to the Thessalonians talking about this day.

He said in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, “While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.”

A day of destruction and a day of darkness and gloom and a day of surprise to those who will experience it.

In short, it is a day of all days to be feared.

This is the vengeance Paul refers to in Romans 12:19 when he says, “‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

This is what God's people need to hear when they are suffering unjustly.

Notice now how Paul pauses for a moment to also talk about the...

REST FOR THE PERSECUTED (v.7)

He says, “And to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven...”

He says “to give relief.”

There is “relief” or “rest” for God’s people.

Everything we experience in this life will soon come to an end but for now we must persevere and endure.

The exact implications of “rest” (*anesis*) are uncertain since it is used of eschatological reward only here in Paul’s writings.

But clearly it involves more than just the cessation of persecution.

“And to us as well” indicates that this “rest” is a state that both the Thessalonians and the evangelists would share.³

³ D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 208.

The full embodiment of that rest is in the eternal state.

D. Edmond Hiebert says the word “relief” carries “the picture of the loosening or relaxing of a taut bowstring, hence suggests the thought of relief through the relaxing of tension or pressure. It thus suggests rest, not from toil and fatigue, but from tension and suffering. Their endurance was now continually on the stretch, but with the reversal of circumstances, welcome relaxation and refreshment would come. The ultimate abolition of tension in the Christian life awaits the second advent.”⁴

In a parable in Luke 18, Jesus says in verses 7-8, “Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However,

⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonians Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971). 287.

when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Paul refers back to the judgment on unbelievers in verse 7 and gives us a vivid description of the judgment.

He first talks about...

The Lord Jesus' Return

He says He will be “revealed from heaven.”

Paul referenced this already in his first letter.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 says, “And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

Acts 1:11 says, “They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

Second he says that the Lord Jesus comes “with His mighty angels.”

This is literally “angels of His power” (Barnes).

D. Edmond Hiebert says, “His does not modify angels but rather power. The power belongs to

Christ and the angels will be its agents, the executors of His commands.”⁵

Jesus spoke of angels attending Him at His return in glory.

Matthew 16:27 says, “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.”

Matthew 25:31 also says, “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.”

Back in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul refers to these angels as “mighty angels.”

⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonians Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971). 288.

In Psalm 103:20 they are referred to as “His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying His voice of His word!”

Paul ends verse 7 stating that Jesus comes with His mighty angels “in flaming fire.”

This is a reference to judgment.

In John's vision in Revelation 1:14, we're told Jesus' eyes “were like a flame of fire.”

Here is a penetrating discernment that searches the inmost depths.

These are the eyes of the Judge before whom all things are laid bare. ⁶

⁶ Lehman Strauss, Revelation, 30.

These are the eyes that speak of searching righteousness and divine judgment upon all that is impure. ⁷

In Daniel 7:9, 10, where the Ancient of Days takes his seat, we are told “his throne was fiery flames (φλὸξ πυρός), its wheels were burning fire (πῦρ φλέγον, Theod.); a stream of fire (ποταμὸς πυρός) issued and came forth from before him.” ^{Cf.} Isa 66:15, 16, where Yahweh comes “in fire (ἐν πυρί) to execute vengeance (ἐκδίκησις) ... in flames of fire (ἐν φλογὶ πυρός)”. ⁸

Notice beginning in verse 8...

The Lord Jesus' Retribution

⁷ John Walvoord, Revelation, 44.

^{Cf.} *confer*, compare

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary : 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002). 151.

He says when the Lord Jesus comes He will be “dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes...” (vv.8-10a).

“Retribution” (ekdikesis) refers to “vengeance, punishment” (WSNTDICT).

It Literally means “to give full punishment.”⁹

Deuteronomy 32:35 says, “Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.”

⁹ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997). 2 Th 1:8.

This full punishment is “on those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This speaks to the lack of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Retribution is not dealt out because they are persecuting Christians, but rather because they did not obey God's command to believe and call upon the name of the Lord to be saved from their sin.¹⁰

Acts 17:30-31 says, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having

¹⁰ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997). 2 Th 1:8.

furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Rom. 10:9–13 says, “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Refusing to repent and believe results in paying “the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes...”

Referring back to verse 6 where Paul says it is “just for God to repay with affliction,” now he defines in verse 9 what that affliction is.

It is the “penalty of eternal destruction.”

“eternal” (aionios) refers to an “endless duration.”

It is used in the New Testament to speak of the endless duration of God (Rom.16:26) and the Holy Spirit (Heb.9:14), as well as the duration of things like heaven (Lk.16:9), salvation (Heb. 5:9) and hell (Mat.18:8).

The destruction of unbelievers will have no end but will last forever.

It's important to note that the “destruction” does not refer to annihilation but to ruination.

It does not mean the cessation of existence but rather the loss of all that makes existence worthwhile (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9).

The lost will not cease to exist but will experience forever a life of uselessness, hopelessness, emptiness, and meaninglessness, with no value, worth, accomplishment, purpose, goal, or hope.

They will be ruined forever; “They pass into a night on which no morning dawns” (Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 120).¹¹

Paul says all this will occur “when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

¹¹ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 245.

marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed” (v.10).

Not only is this day a day of retribution but also a day of rest.

This is the rest or relief Paul mentions in verse 7.

When Jesus comes, He will be “glorified in His saints” and “marveled at” because they now see the fullness of their salvation and the One who provided forgiveness and redemption.

CONCLUSION

What glorious day for believers but no so for those who do not believe.

Punishment is promised for unbelievers but relief and rest for those who do believe.

Which one are you?

My prayer is you are truly His and are manifesting His glory in your life today.

So that in that day, you will be pure vessels to radiate His glory throughout eternity.

Let's pray.

[LORD'S SUPPER]

LIFE APPLICATION

What are your first thoughts when you hear of the fate of unbelievers?

What are you doing to keep unbelievers from the day of judgment?

What are you doing to ready yourself for the return of Jesus?