

**Final Judgment
November 6, 2016**

"Justice Will Come When Jesus Returns"

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-10

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. ⁵ All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. ⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

When someone treats you unfairly there is a certain satisfaction that comes when justice is served. Take this for an example. You are driving down the freeway in the left lane. In the rear view mirror you see a large black pickup truck pulling up fast behind you. You cannot get over to the right because of traffic. That does not stop this truck from coming up close to you and riding your bumper. Finally you are able to pull over and the truck tears off down the freeway and pulls up close behind another car just as he did with you. Ten miles down the road you see the same truck pulled over by the CHP. "Yes, justice is served!"

Justice will be served when Jesus comes on clouds of glory to take us home to the place he has prepared for us. Maybe you caught this from the words we just read to you. "God is just: he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well." Paul is writing to Christians who were going through trouble or tribulation for their faith. Children wondered if their daddy would ever come home because he had been put into prison for believing in Jesus. The cry goes up, "How long will it be until justice is served and Jesus takes us home."

Justice will be served when Jesus returns. Then he will cast down Satan into the lake of fire where he will no longer tempt us and torment us. Justice will be served when Jesus returns. Then he will end all the pain and suffering of this life and take us to the place he has prepared for us. Jesus said when that day comes we can lift up our heads for our redemption is drawing near. Justice will be served.

There will be tribulation

Jesus told his disciples they would experience pain and suffering, even hatred from people, because they followed him. This was true for the dear Christians to whom Paul is writing,

the Christians living in a place called Thessalonica. What beautiful people they were. Paul writes, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love everyone has for each other is increasing." The Christians living in Thessalonica were a model for other Christians. Paul wrote in a previous letter, "God has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, and the with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."

What happens when Christians start living their lives as the light of the world and the salt of the earth because of what Jesus has done to rescue them? Immediately they begin to clash with the world around them that still lives in darkness. That's what happened to these people and why Paul writes, "Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring." The word for perseverance has the thought of being able to endure or put up with suffering in life. Christians are able to do this because they know how much Jesus loves them and cares about them. They have the hope of a much better life waiting for them in the future.

The suffering Christians endure for their faith is the evidence that they believe in God's system of justice. "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering." You believe God's judgment and God's system of justice is right. Your life gives evidence of this fact. You feel compelled by your love for people to tell them that a holy and perfect God cannot accept people in their sin. By his very nature as a perfect God he must punish all sin as Romans 1 says, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress their the truth by their wickedness."

You also feel compelled by your love for people to tell them how the one true God delivers people from his own justice by having his Son pay the price for their sin. Isaiah 53 says, "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds were are healed." It is always a privilege to be counted worthy to bear witness to this justice of God in the last days even if it means our lives are taken from us.

The Greek word for witness is "marturos" from which we get our words "martyr." People have died to bring this message to other who don't want to hear it because they love them and want them to be safe when judgment day comes. When Peter and John were flogged by the Jewish leaders for witnessing to Jesus and his resurrection, it says in the Book of Acts, "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (the name of Jesus)."

Some years ago now our the evangelism committee of our congregation developed a prayer for boldness. This prayer came out of our study of the book of Acts. "Lord God, You know the challenges we face in a world that does not want You. Place Your hand of blessing on Your servants and make us bold to proclaim Your pure Word. By Your Holy Spirit lead many to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, the only hope of salvation. Amen." This prayer for boldness is a dangerous prayer because the more bold we become in witnessing to God's justice, the more we will risk being unjustly treated by the world that wants nothing to do with Jesus. What happened to Jesus will also happen to us. Jesus spoke about great tribulation or trouble. He spoke about picking up our cross and following him.

Justice will be served

The day is coming soon when justice will be served. "God is just: he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well." Those who hate Jesus and those who hate all those who follow him will come under God's justice when Jesus returns in clouds of glory. When the Jewish leaders were condemning Jesus to death in their court of injustice, they asked him to tell them under oath if he was the Christ. Then Jesus said, "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on clouds of glory." Jesus did not speak these words to gloat over his enemies and celebrate their destruction. He spoke these words with tears in his eyes. He longed to have his worst enemies come to faith in him so they could escape the judgment to come.

We are like Jesus. We don't gloat over those who may persecute and shame us for our belief in him. Oh, we may feel good when the big black truck gets pulled over by the CHP, but we don't find sick joy in seeing someone else getting justice on judgment day. No, we pray with Jesus who prayed for his enemies, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." In Ezekiel chapter 18 the Lord says, "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?... Rather am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" The Lord provides people with an opportunity to repent and live, but then finally the end comes and final justice must be served.

The focus in our worship today is on the last judgment. The time is coming when Jesus will return on clouds of glory to raise all the dead and bring them into the final judgment. "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power."

The president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, did not like the words of Jesus in the New Testament Gospel accounts that spoke about judgment day and the coming destruction. So he cut them out of the Bible and made his own Bible. We cannot cut them out with a sharp knife, or use white out to blot them off the page, or cross them out with pen and ink. Nor can we just put them out of our mind and ignore them. The words are clear, so very clear. Jesus wants people to obey his message of the gospel. He wants them to believe with all their hearts he has done everything necessary expunge from their record everything they ever did wrong. Without saving faith in him, there will be everlasting destruction and everlasting separation from God's power and his love for us.

As we approach another election, we are concerned about what will be happening to our country in the future. What kind of country will there be for my children and my grand children? A far more important question facing us is what will we be doing to help people see the reality of what is facing them in the future without Jesus. The Christians in Thessalonica were models to other Christians as they boldly bore witness to Jesus and risked even death to warn people of what was most important in life.

When Jesus comes we will welcome him because we know what he has done to satisfy God's justice. "On that day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you because you believed our testimony to you." The Chicago Cubs fans were happy when their team won the World Series this past week. That joy is nothing, it is so small, compared to the joy that will be ours when Jesus returns. Then he will be glorified and marveled at among those who believe. I can't wait to celebrate with my parents and all who have died in Jesus that day when Jesus returns in glory to take his people home because Jesus satisfied God's justice for us.

The story is told of pioneers who were crossing the Great Plains in a wagon train. It was a hot day and the wind was blowing hard. They noticed off into the west dark black smoke rising high into the sky. A fast moving prairie fire was on its way. The people panicked. The wagon master told them not to be afraid as he lit the dry prairie grass over which they had just passed. The fire moved quickly and then he led them safely into the burnt over area where the approaching fire could not hurt them. Dear Christian, you have safety in Jesus. God's justice has been served in Jesus. And now you can welcome the final judgment for this is your coronation day. Amen.