

## 2 Thessalonians 1:6-12 – “Justice, Judgment, and Glory”

### Summary Statement:

Paul encourages the Thessalonian church amidst their suffering, emphasizing that God is just and that justice will be seen in comforting the afflicted, and in punishing the wicked in judgment. This will ultimately lead to glory for those who hold fast to their faith.

Last Sunday we talked about the persecutions and tribulations the saints were enduring in Thessalonica and how it was the manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God. And we discussed how that sounds like a contradiction. How were the saints undergoing persecution for their faith revealing the righteous judgment of God? This sounds more unrighteous. But God was at work through this. First of all, God was preparing them for His kingdom. Their suffering proved their faith and strengthened them. And their example was being used as a testimony to strengthen other believers as Paul boasted of them to other churches (1:4).

So God was at work through all that they were experiencing – even in suffering.

In fact as we continue on, we’re going to see a three-fold promise to the church in persecution. It’s revealing even further for us how this righteous judgment of God is manifest. We saw the first one last week:

### 1) Reward. ...*that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God*...

This certainly did not imply that they could earn their way into heaven by persevering through persecution. We know that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.

- But just like gold that is refined through the fire by separating the dross from that which is pure, suffering has a refining quality in the life of the believer. The fire of trials and persecution purifies the believer and reveals what he is by God’s grace. When suffering is responded to properly, it only exposes the quality of the person that is fit for the kingdom. And great is their reward.
- **Matthew 5:10–12, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

- This is the promise throughout the New Testament for the believer. Nothing is in vain. And God's righteous judgments are seen in that He produces good for us through all that we endure in faithfulness.
- J.B. Phillips translation: 'see how justly the judgment of God works out! He intends to use your sufferings to prove you worthy of his kingdom.'

## 1. Justice Promised – 1:6-7

The second promise we see for the believer is:

### 2) Retribution.

**1:6 - *since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,***

There is coming a day when the Lord will descend back to this earth and will personally repay all those who have come against God and His people. His righteous judgment will be manifest in this way.

It's a hard thing for Christians to reconcile the hardships we endure in this world where it seems bad things happen to seemingly good people. Or when we see good things happen to the apparent wicked. Why doesn't God correct these things? Why doesn't it seem that God is involved? These can be the natural responses and questions people can have.

- C.S. Lewis wrote about these issues in his book "The Problem of Pain". And it's there that he emphasizes the eternal and sovereign work of God through times of suffering. He does a work in us through it, as he writes: "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. ...No doubt pain as God's megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and unrepented rebellion. But it gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment."
- So there's a purpose for the pain and suffering. But we're seeing how the righteous judgments of God unfold through these things. And as C.S. Lewis also adds, one of those righteous judgments in suffering is that God will indeed judge and repay the wicked. God will correct all those wrongs and make all things right when He rids the world of sin, evil, and death.

The struggle we have is that it may seem like the unrighteous; the persecutors of the saints are getting away with it.

- We consider what's going on in Nigeria right now. Christians are being slaughtered by the thousands. Nigeria accounted for 72% of Christians killed worldwide last year (2025). This is alarming.
- This is a growing concern in a world that seems to have tolerance for everything except Christianity.

And we can wonder, Lord is this ever going to change? Will there ever be a stop to this? What we are seeing in our text today is Yes, there is coming a day when this will be stopped, and all these persecutors will be judged. This will happen when Jesus comes again as judge and executioner. Now that sounds almost harsh. But it's the reality. And Paul is letting these persecuted saints in Thessalonica, and us today, know that they're not going to get away with these things.

As believers you will be **rewarded**, and there will be **retribution** laid on the rebellious and wicked.

We need to look at our present trials through that lens of eternity. We must recognize that our present trials are working something in us, and that they are temporary. For God will act, and God will be seen to be just. How we need this eternal focus and endurance.

**2 Corinthians 4:17–18**, *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,<sup>18</sup> while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

This **tribulation** (Gk=θλιβό), is to be pressed, or compressed. It's to cause to suffer hardship. This is what the believers have been feeling by their persecutors. Maybe you're going through a season where you're experiencing this. It may not result in loss of life, but it could be a trial nonetheless that is hard to bear. But endure in faith. Because the Lord is going to bring that back upon those causing you to suffer.

We're not taking joy in that. We're not celebrating this. We're to pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44).

- But we take comfort in the fact that the righteous judge will give them what is due them.

It's interesting how we're to walk this narrow way. It's not always easy. But it leads to life. The word difficult in Matt 7:14 is the word *thlibō*.

**Matthew 7:14, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."**

- These persecutors may feel like they're pressing in on you, but one day they're going to experience the pressing of God's judgment and it will be far worse for them than anything we had to endure in this life.

The third promise for persecuted believers is seen in vs. 7:

### 3) Rest.

**1:7 - *and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,***

When Jesus returns, we will then experience this great rest. This speaks of relief from trouble and persecution. Isn't that going to be a glorious day. To know that we will no longer have anything we need to endure or suffer through. It's a time we'll be at rest and no longer looking over our shoulder to see where the next trial may be coming from. Hallelujah!

Now it's true, the question often rings out, how long Lord? How much longer do I have to wait until that time? But rest in Him now.

He's promised us this:

- **Matthew 11:28, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."**

Praise God there will come a time where we will be delivered from our trials and set free from sin.

Now as Paul is writing this he's ultimately looking at this coming judgment of the wicked taking place during the tribulation period and fulfilled at Christ's coming. And it seems he's writing this as though this was going to happen in their day. And I believe Paul thought it was that close, though it wasn't. And this doesn't mean Paul was wrong to think this way. I think God has designed every generation to live with that thinking that they could be that generation to see the return of the Lord. This is a much more exciting way to live life.

So as Paul is talking about the return of the Lord, keep in mind he's not talking about the Rapture here. He's talking about that period of the Day of the Lord. It

will encompass that 7 year tribulation on the earth which is the wrath of the Lamb upon a Christ rejecting world. The tribulation will end with the return of the Lord to the earth. And He will come with judgment. This is what Paul is referencing in these verses we're looking at.

Some might say, how do you know there's two separate events in the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ? The answer is that Scriptures make that distinction. Here's some key differences between the Rapture and the Revelation (the Second Coming of Christ).

1. At the Rapture Jesus is coming for His Church (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:14-17).

At the 2nd Coming He comes with His Church (Col 3:4; Jude 14; Rev 19:14).

2. At the Rapture Jesus comes in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17).

At the 2nd Coming He comes to earth (Zech 14:4).

3. At the Rapture only Christians will see Jesus (1 Cor 15:52; 1 John 3:2).

At the 2nd Coming every eye will see Him (Rev 1: 7).

4. The Rapture happens in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:52).

The 2nd Coming happens slowly - it will take some time (Zech 12:10; Acts 1:11; Matt 24:30; Rev 1:7).

5. At the Rapture those who are taken are taken for blessing, and those left are left for judgment (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Thess 5:1-3).

At the 2nd Coming those who are taken are taken for judgment, and those left are left for blessing (Matt 24:37-41).

6. The tribulation begins after the Rapture (1 Thess 4-5; Rev 6-18).

The Millennial Kingdom begins after the 2nd Coming (Rev 20).

7. At the Rapture Satan will not be bound (2 Thess 2:9).

At the 2nd Coming Satan will be bound (Rev 20:2-3).

8. The Rapture presents a message of hope and comfort (1 Thess 4:18; Titus 2:13, 1 John 3:3).

The 2nd Coming presents a message of wrath and judgment (Joel 3:12-16; Rev 19:11-21).

9. At the Rapture, **Christ Himself** will gather the saints (1 Thess 4:16). At the 2nd Coming, **the angels** will gather the elect (Matt 24:31).

10. The Rapture is identified with the **Day of Christ** (1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6,10).

The 2nd Coming is identified with the **Day of the Lord** (2 Thess 2:1-12).

This last point is clearly seen in this next passage...

## 2. Judgment Pronounced – 1:8-10

**1:8-10** - *in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup> when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.*

When the Lord comes back to the earth at His Second Coming it will be that time of retribution and judgment.

It's interesting how people speak of Jesus today as only loving and gracious. Liberal Christians love to emphasize that Jesus would never condemn or do anything to hurt another. Umm, I think there's a lot of passages they're failing to read in their Bibles. I'm not really even sure they read their Bibles, let alone have one. Because these verses paint a very different picture of Jesus than what we're accustomed to. But it's important we balance these things out. Because yes, He's loving and gracious. Absolutely. But He is also just and righteous. And there is coming a time that in His justice and righteousness He will stamp out sin and evil. He wouldn't be a good God if He didn't.

Now notice who this judgment is coming for. It's not just the mass-murderers, or the most corrupt and wicked. It's those **who do not know God** and **those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

- You see, I think there's a lot of people living their life thinking they're going to be just fine in that day of judgment because they're not really bad people. Compared to others, they may think they're a real saint.

- But the standard is not how good you are compared to others. The standard is do you know God and do you follow His Word?

And it's not so much do you know God but are you known by God. Jesus said His sheep are those that hear Him and follow Him:

**John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."**

That's why for some people they're going to be shocked in that day when they hear: '*I never knew you; depart from Me...*' (Matthew 7:23).

If people choose to not obey the gospel (which is to receive the good news that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin and take the judgment of God upon Himself and remove it from us. All those that see their need for Jesus and submit to Him are saved. This is to obey the gospel) the outcome is clear: ***these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.***

This is speaking of hell. And hell is not something we like to talk about, but we need to talk about it.

- Jesus spoke on hell more than He spoke on heaven. People need to be warned of this horrific place that is not folklore but a reality.
- Just as believers live forever in God's glory, sinners will live forever in everlasting destruction.
- Now you may have heard of the debate that's been going on lately in Christian circles with Kirk Cameron coming out and stating he's changed his views on the eternity of hell. And he's moved toward an annihilationist position. This is the belief that after the final judgment sinners (along with Satan and demons) will be totally destroyed and their consciousness extinguished.
- Now I must say, I like this view. This is a much more pleasant view. But I don't believe this is the biblical view. Paul makes it clear here in 2 Thessalonians that there will be ***everlasting destruction.***

This is stated clearly in **Revelation 20:10, "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."**

The lake of fire is where all will end up who have not put their trust in Jesus as their Saviour. Jesus used the term 'everlasting fire' in **Matthew 25:41, "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:'"**

And keep in mind, as this verse states, hell was created for Satan and his demons.

Moody used to say, ‘Any human being who goes to hell is a trespasser.’ Hell is not Satan’s home. It’s not a place he’s in charge of. It’s a place he will be in torment forever, along with all who have not followed Jesus.

God doesn’t want you to be there. He’s made every provision for you to avoid it. Jesus paid the penalty for your sin, which is death. That penalty needs to be paid by everyone. You either pay it yourself, in which you end up in hell, or you allow Jesus to pay it for you. He offers you the gift of life freely to all who come to Him. Have you received that free gift of salvation?

“The word **vengeance** must not be confused with *revenge*. The purpose of vengeance is to satisfy God’s holy law; the purpose of revenge is to pacify a personal grudge. God does not hold a grudge against lost sinners. Quite the contrary, He sent His Son to die for them, and He pleads with them to return to Him. But if sinners prefer to “know not God, and … obey not the Gospel” (2 Thes. 1:8), there is nothing left for God to do but judge them.”<sup>1</sup>

In vs. 10, that Day is speaking of this Day of the Lord. It’s a time that is focussed on the retribution and judgment of God. And like we saw in 1 Thessalonians 5, the day in Jewish reckoning always moves from darkness to light. It will be a dark time to begin, but the light will come when Jesus returns.

And notice, when Jesus returns, He will **be glorified in His saints**.

It’s not that Jesus will be glorified with His saints or by His saints, but that He will be glorified *in His saints*. That’s so cool. He’s going to mirror His glory in us. His glory is going to be radiating through His church – the body of Christ. The revelation of Jesus will see His glory reflected in us in our glorified bodies. When Jesus returns the persecutors will be judged because of their refusal to accept Jesus as Saviour, but the afflicted will be glorified because they have put their trust in the Saviour. What a day that will be. And we’ll be beaming with our Saviour saying, everything we went through cannot for a moment compare to the glory that is now being experienced (Romans 8:18).

And all will see and admire the King of kings who triumphs gloriously.

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 194). Victor Books.

### 3. Glory Produced – 1:11-12

**1:11-12 - *Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, <sup>12</sup> that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

I love the heart of Paul. He's faithful to write and encourage them in the truth, but he also is a man of prayer, and he prays diligently that they would continue on in the truth. There is strength in prayer.

He prays here that **God would count you worthy of this calling**... What calling? It's what Paul has just been talking about. The fact that they are not just saved but that they will be glorified in Christ. This is their calling and destiny. Paul always highlighted what the believer has received in Christ as the motivation to live for Christ.

- **Ephesians 4:1**, "*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,*"
- The first 3 chapters of Ephesians is showing all the incredible blessings we have through Jesus. So because of what He's done for us, walk worthy.

And this is not some test to see if you can make it to the end, like it's the hunger games. It's our calling, but it's also God who is at work in you to empower you to fulfill it: **and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith and power.**

God is working out His purposes through all that we go through. And if Jesus is our life, then His purposes being fulfilled in our lives are to our blessing and joy.

It's all for His glory! May the name of our Lord Jesus be glorified in you and through you as you live worthy of the life He's given you and the future that is ours in Him.

#### Points to Ponder:

1. Am I trusting in God's justice or am I anxious in affliction?
2. Do I know the reality of future judgment, and have I received God's provision for deliverance?
3. Am I praying for ease or for endurance; that my life may bring glory to God?