

## **Sermon Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10**

*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. <sup>6</sup> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might <sup>10</sup> 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.*

## **Sermon Theme: Safety in the Coming Judgment**

Not many people actually like tests. You may recall that uncomfortable nervousness about that upcoming test in school. It kept you up the night before running through different things you didn't want to forget. It gave you sweaty palms while taking it. But it's not just school tests we don't like. It's the tests at the clinic or doctor's office when you have to then wait and see what the results might be. It's the testing and judgment from society. We know we aren't supposed to judge other people. It's engrained into us that it's wrong. But we also know how people are always judging and testing us.

We are not big fans of tests. Why? A big part of it is because we are afraid of the results. We are afraid what it will say about my character, my health, what it says about me. It's made even worse when you feel like you can't defend yourself with what those results say. And, yet, here is Paul in 2 Thessalonians encouraging us with the prospect of a test on the Last Day when Jesus returns.

You may recall playing a game of tag when you were younger. You and those playing decided a tree, an area, something was "home" where you would be safe from whoever was "It." It's not only in a simple game of tag but life in general where home is supposed to be safe. There's a reason why someone breaking in and robbing from your house would be so traumatizing. It's not so much the thing that is taken, but that safety of home has been violated. We want and expect there to be safety at home.

But that's not necessarily how the Thessalonians were feeling about their home. Facing continued persecution and trials for the faith, it is easy to understand that they would feel this way. But not only are they not feeling physically safe, they very well may have been wrestling with how safe they were in their relationship with God. You know as well as I do when suffering comes into our lives we wonder if we may have done something to make God angry at us. But, Paul says in v. 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.”** In other words, suffering for their faith was not a punishment but a proof of faith and God’s grace.

And those who are afflicting the people and making their lives miserable are not pulling a fast one on God. It’s not like God has forgotten his people. Paul encourages them in v.6 **“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.”** This safety isn’t going to come from your earthly home. It rests in your God who promises that he will avenge his people. This relief comes from your God who is just. You may not and probably won’t see those results today, tomorrow, or even months down the road. But God promises you will for sure see it, **“When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels” (v.7b).**

As a mask is pulled off to reveal who is underneath, when Jesus returns he will no longer veil his glory. All will see him for who he really is. In blazing fire with his powerful angels Jesus will return on the Last Day. There will be no mistaking or missing out when Jesus returns at the End of all that is. There won’t be a waiting for next time to be more prepared. When Jesus returns, **“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (v.8).**

Those who find their safety in telling themselves, “No one can judge me,” will stand before the Judge of all. Those who convince themselves their safety is believing there are many different ways to be saved will quickly learn how wrong they are. In God’s courtroom there will be claims of, “I didn’t know any better!” But everyone is born with the natural knowledge that there is something greater than them. But instead of pursuing the truth, many push down and suppress that knowledge or it is distorted so they follow something else besides the one true God. This means, as Paul says in Romans 1, “All mankind is without excuse.” Knowing that there is a God, having what is called this natural knowledge of God, is not enough to save someone. It is enough to condemn. Those ones will be just as guilty and punished as those who outright reject and did not obey the Gospel. Those are ones who hear what Jesus did for them, but they did not want to believe it to be their own. They were offered forgiveness, but they believed they needed to do something to save themselves. God gives the one thing that guarantees safety, and they threw it in the trash. And since God is just, he will punish them.

You may be thinking, “I know someone who really needs to hear this.” But what about you? Are you ready for judgment? You have more than just a knowledge there is a God out there, you know his will. You’ve been in his Word. And, yet, all too easily we seem to live with the mindset that there is plenty of time later to get my affairs in order. And so we feel safe when reaching for that next drink, going onto that website, or watching that video, because you will plan to do better tomorrow. You feel safe allowing the

busyness of life and schedule, the demands and expectations of others keep you away from being in God's Word. Why? Because you have every intention that when you are less busy you will get around to it. You pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Yet you feel safe holding onto that grudge because you feel it's not time to let it go. You may place your safety in your relationships with other people. You may feel safe because of the work you can do, the experiences you get to enjoy, the home you live in right now.

But when the master Jesus returns and calls you to account, what will you show him? You know how you have not always been faithful with your time. You know how too often you use your talents to get yourself ahead in life and make you feel better about who you are. You know how you have allowed your possessions, your things, your wants to determine your decisions in life. You know how you have not always lived in obedience to God's Word. You know how you have lived as if you did not know God or his will but followed your own desires.

When Jesus returns there will be all sorts of bargaining and plea deals that people will try and strike with him. There will be pointing to how good of person someone may have been. There will be excuses of not knowing any better. But whatever the excuse is, they won't help anyone's case. Jesus won't ask you how much you have saved up in your bank account. He's not going to check to be sure you enjoyed life and lived it to the fullest. He isn't interested in the circle of friends you had or your status in society. Those who do not meet God's standard of perfection, **"Will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might"** (v.9). Destruction that will not end, cut off from God's presence without a shred of hope, that's what waits in hell.

God the Father says, "I have to do it. If we are going to be a just God, I have to punish sin. We can't ignore it. There are no excuses. I made it clear, be holy and without sin, just like us."

And Jesus, true God from eternity, steps in, "I know. We have to...I know. So let me go. I'll take their place."

God the Father tells Jesus, his own Son, "You know what that means. If I give you to them, I can't hold anything back. If we are going to be just, and if you are taking their place, I have to punish you completely. I'm going to completely cut you off from my presence. I'm going to abandon you so that you cry out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

And Jesus says, "I know. And I'm still going to do it. You punish me, so they will have peace with you. I will suffer on the cross for all their sins, so they might have relief. I will endure hell on that cross, so they will be saved from eternal destruction in hell."

And that's what Jesus does. He becomes sin for us. He carries your sins and all the sins of the world in his body as he is nailed to the cross. God the Father cuts off his Son from his presence. He abandons him to the suffering and punishment of all sin. But this was all according to God's eternal plan. And we know it all went according to that plan because on Easter morning Jesus is raised from the dead. This is proof that what Jesus says on the cross is most certainly true. The work of saving mankind, "It is finished." In Jesus, there is safety.

That same risen Jesus has returned to the Father in heaven where the Triune God continues to work. God the Holy Spirit says, "I'm going to make it so that this is their own. I'm going to work through the Word so that they know us. And not just know about God, but I'm going to work saving faith in their heart so that they believe and trust what Jesus did belongs to them."<sup>1</sup>

So the Holy Spirit works through that Word and Sacrament to keep you in the one true faith until life everlasting. He wraps you in Jesus' own perfection in baptism giving you confidence that you are safe with God as his child. Working through the Word with the bread and wine you receive Jesus' body and blood given for you in the Lord's Supper. This forgiveness of sin is your own that you touch and taste. Already today you have this relief—a peace that surpasses understanding—because you know that standing in God's courtroom for judgment you have nothing to fear. For Jesus' sake, God will not treat you or judge you as your sins deserve. He's a just God. Jesus already paid the price so that no accusation can be brought against you. The test says, "Not guilty of sin." You are safe in Jesus.

And to keep you in that safety God continues to work through your church home where Jesus assures us through Word and Sacrament. In this church home we encourage one another to look ahead to that heavenly home. We wait assuring each other as a family in Christ that Jesus is coming soon. Together we look forward to when we will be the mirror reflecting Jesus' glory as his holy people washed clean in his blood. We wait in safety of the coming judgment because by the faith God works in your heart you believe this testimony to be true. And with the holy ones of heaven and all of God's people, we say, "Come, Lord Jesus, Come." Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thank you, Pastor Josh Hillmann for this illustration.