

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] That's 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 5 through 12. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also are suffering.

Since indeed, God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 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 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.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord, and away from the glory of his might. 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.

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, 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 the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Well, our Heavenly Father, I ask now that you would hide me behind your cross, and that my words on this passage, which contains such strong language, would be as sensitive as your Spirit would want them to be.

[2 : 02] Help us as we listen to your word to live under it, to the best of our ability, in Christ's name, amen. Letters of commendation are written for a variety of reasons.

You might request a letter of commendation if you're trying to get into a particular school or program. Perhaps a job would require somebody commending your person and professional expertise.

An apartment that wants more than financial security, but some emotional security, that your presence in that building will be to the betterment of all.

Letters of commendation are written for a variety of reasons, and when you have one, it serves one overarching purpose.

It gives you greater assurance, a greater sense of confidence, a belief in yourself that you may be worthy of entering into the program of your choice, or the home of your own desires, or the vocation of your first choosing.

[3 : 41] The United States Marine Corps, the basic school training command at Camp Barrett in Virginia, has in their student handbook words pertaining to awards.

And one of those awards is a certificate of commendation, a cert com. I quote, By Marine Corps order, a commander with Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Approval Authority can approve a cert com.

Cert coms are not included in the Marine Corps awards processing system, but are forwarded to the CMC for entry into the Marines' official military personnel file.

It would be a good thing to have on file what an officer above you would deem of your person. Why do I open a message from 2 Thessalonians on the idea of a letter of commendation? Simply this, the transition from verses 4 to 5 in the text, from last week's closing to this week's opening, moves from Paul boasting to others about them, to what we see in verse 5.

[5 : 18] Paul now assuring them that God's commendation rests upon them. I want you to see that transition from his boast, verse 4, about them to the commendation of God that presently rests upon them.

Here's the way the Bible reads, beginning in verse 4, Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in all the afflictions

that you are enduring.

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also are suffering.

Three observations on verse 5, which I take to be God's present commendation on them.

First of all, what is this righteous judgment that God has made upon the church? What is this?

[6 : 30] Well, it's that they are worthy to receive the kingdom of God. God has written down, as it were, through making a judgment upon them, herein I state you are worthy to receive the kingdom of God.

Entrance into the greatest of all homes, the greatest of all eternal vocations, the greatest of all institutions, families, the very word of God, his judgment, which is right.

You are considered worthy of the kingdom of God. That's what it is. And on what grounds is God able to write the letter?

I mean, look at the evidence. This is evidence. What is evidence? Verse 4, Your steadfastness and faith in the midst of persecutions and afflictions is the evidence that would support his worthy judgment that you will one day dwell in heaven with him forever.

This is the astounding call of God upon the church in Thessalonica. Let me see if I can explain his logic.

[8 : 09] They had come to faith through a message received that spoke of the necessity of Christ's sufferings for salvation.

That was the logic. They had come to faith by receiving a message that Christ's sufferings were necessary for salvation.

So, too, their sufferings now prove that they are the legitimate heirs of all the promises of the message that they believed.

Now, this is the inversion of logic in the world. Their present afflictions on behalf of Christ were proof to Paul that they had embraced the very message that was embodied by the sufferings of Christ.

When you and I suffer for the name of Christ, we are likely to think that he is absent from us. And Paul says, quite the contrary.

[9 : 19] In the sufferings of Christ, God was present with us. And so, when you endure sufferings for his name, you have the stamp of approval of the legitimacy of the error of all the promises.

This is what the church needed to hear. Commendation. What is the commendation? That the church is worthy to receive the kingdom of God.

On what grounds are we worthy? For evidence, we look to the church's participation in the sufferings of Christ. And when might we get that letter?

Interestingly, look at the present tense of verse 5. This is evidence. Here's the uniqueness of the text.

God has already written the letter of commendation that is in the personal file of every Christian. It's already written.

[10 : 36] When you and I think of the judgment of God, what do we think of? We think of a far-off day in the future. That's not the case here.

What he's indicating is you already have the letter of commendation in you and for proof merely look to the sufferings you endure for his name.

This is astounding. The judgment of God then is already on the people of God. And guess what kind of judgment it is?

He approves of you. He will give unto you. He stands with you. He's with you.

You are considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also are suffering. Let me just summarize then the effect of verse 5.

[11 : 45] If you had a letter of commendation from God in your file that said I hereby declare God that you are worthy of the kingdom because like my son you are willing to participate in the sufferings then you have a confidence that is buoyed amidst all tribulations.

what's the most treasured thing you could have in your pocket? Would it not be a letter of commendation from God? Would you not go to bed at night and put it under your pillow and take it out and flash your iPhone on momentarily to read it again?

God considers me worthy to receive the kingdom of God. You would guard it. you would protect it. It would strengthen you.

And that is what Paul is doing here. The church had been hard pressed. The church had wondered is he with us or against us?

Is there justice when we are so mistreated? Said the church members in Thessalonica and Paul's letter now has moved with strength in the area of commendation.

[13 : 25] But at verse six it shifts again. It shifts not from what Christians have from God in the present but to what non Christians can expect from God in the future.

It shifts from your present commendation to the church considering their future condemnation. That's the movement in verses six through nine. and it does so on the future sense of the term when in verse six.

Since indeed verse six God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us when the Lord Jesus is revealed.

Now this is the logic of his text. Their sufferings present tense are going to find relief on the day when he's revealed in which God will repay those who are persecuting the church.

[14 : 50] And the language here is amazing. In other words there are two judgments! of God we like to think of there's only one judgment there's two judgments one the judgment the church gets in the present two the judgment the unbelieving world will get in the future.

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven there will be relief for the church and repayment for those who persecute it.

Now look at the language here. It is sensitive and needs to be spoken of with sensitivity. It is some of the strongest language in the scriptures on a final judgment.

They're difficult words to read. That the Lord Jesus is going to come again with mighty angels verse seven in flaming fire verse eight inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

In other words that there's going to be a final day where if you have not placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he will serve as your judge and not your savior and it promises to be horrific in every way and with eternal consequence verse nine they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might what are we to make of it I want to say four things about it this future and final judgment on non believers but first

[17 : 07] I want you to know that it is a teaching that is consistent with Jesus teachings as evidenced in many of his parables in the gospels there is a common misconception today that Jesus himself was only entirely loving and would not come as judge or a belief certainly given that he is loving would condemn yet in his own parables he speaks of the day when there will be a separation of the sheep and the goats he speaks of a day where some will go to where the worm in a sense continues to eat and people are away from the presence of the Lord using fire as his illustrative example the teaching of the church the Christian church is not antithetical to the proclamation of

Jesus himself not only that it's consistent with teachings that are beyond Christianity Judaism itself in Daniel 12 most clearly described a final day of double resurrection where the whole world would one day stand before God some unto righteous eternal life and others unto eternal judgment and and even deists many of whom were founding fathers in our own country like Benjamin Franklin or Thomas Jefferson while not holding unto themselves the fullness of Christian teachings that I'm proclaiming to you today nevertheless spoke of and retained for the country a final day of reckoning that's what they held that that there was a

God you go back and read Jefferson's Bible in which he excised the miraculous moments of the ministry of Christ and you will find that he did not cut from the scriptures the final day of reckoning so this this non-Christian conception that's in play in the world that there may be a day of final judgment this this movement within Judaism that there may be a double resurrection unto which we all stand accountable this Jesus teaching that although he comes in love is nevertheless speaking of the same and this Christian proclamation that there is going to be a final reckoning that's all there in light of that what would I say I would say four things this kind of wrath that is spoken of here is not something to be wished on even your worst enemy it is so horrific we don't wish this kind of thing on anyone for far lesser things we don't wish a prolonged illness on anyone we don't wish the penalty of death on anyone we lament even when it's right or just or appropriate to confine someone to an entire life behind bars we don't wish that on anyone even if we're aware that it might at times be necessary lest the perpetrators afflict the innocent without cause when I read these verses

I want you to know that the wrath of God is not something we would wish on anyone which is what makes the phrase the G D phrase the God damning phrase if it comes from our lips one of the most frightening phrases to emit on another second this wrath is is not a weapon that a preacher or a Christian would would ever hope to wield this is not the weapon of choice for the church which is what makes so many parts of the church so offensive to the world when the church takes the wrath and wields it like indiscriminate siph across an ungodly world now if the church is holding this doctrine correctly we are declaring to the world that yes there is such a day and we would proclaim to you by any and every necessary means that you must escape it and that there is a way of escaping this and the message from the church concerns the love of God in the sending of his son who endured our just wrath that through faith his unremitting eternal judgment would be turned from me because it was placed on him and that

I myself might be set free the Christian gospel is to escape this in Christ by faith and it ought to be ever spoken of with tears I think this is what Paul says when he finishes with the elders in Acts 20 he says I admonish you day and night with tears now I know that there may be some that in our day I know emotionalism runs amok in the pulpit and there are preachers around the globe that will manipulate or try to force your will to believe something you do not believe and I would never hope to do that to you myself I do not want to manipulate your will but I want to lay this before you in such a way that I would freely invite you to escape the coming day of wrath and the mercies of [24 : 47] Christ through faith and that if you see emotion rising in the pulpit of holy trinity that you would at least be acknowledging that nobody here is trying to turn you against your will but they viscerally want you to have the commendation of God that you are worthy to receive his kingdom and to arrive at that day and at the gates they say of Saint Peter and to pull from your pocket the assurance of your salvation which is in the handwriting of God through the blood of his son that that's why that's why we get all wrapped up because this is an evil day the wrath of

God is not wished on upon anyone the wrath of God is not a weapon wielded against anyone thirdly the wrath of God here interestingly contextually is to bind up those who are presently wounded the context is important here notice the audience of verses six to nine it's the church he brings up the wrath of God for the ears of the Christian community who at this place and at this time was being unjustly persecuted in other words the final doctrine of a judgment upon unbelievers is actually spoken of to reassure a people who had been grossly mistreated but even here it is balm the balm of relief that an unjust world would finally be called to account for what it does against God and its hatred of God in other words these are words that are given to a bloodied but unbowed people who have been the recipients of an ungodly persecuting in other words they're wondering where is God's justice and these words say you will one day have relief and those who have opposed the glorious gospel of Christ will find repayment those are the words those are the our words in the text repay verse six relief verse six when he's revealed verse six finally the wrath of God then here is to bring resilience for the church until relief finally comes let me let me see if I can get there by way of illustration these words on wrath function like the battle hymn of republic lyrically functioned at the time of the civil war and in the struggle of the civil rights movement that's how they function the battle hymn of republic with those words mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored he has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword his truth is marching on it was penned when an individual saw the resilience of the union army withstand the assault from the other side it was used by dr martin luther king jr when he finally completed with finality the selma march in that speech which has often been called how long not long when the people who had been persecuted stood and said justice will one day be done it became the marching song of the civil rights era because it was the final line king used on the night before he was assassinated god's truth would be marching on his eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the lord they spoke about final justice and making it right because it buoyed them in their persecuted state that's the way they function here commendation condemnation for the purpose of comfort look at verse 10 the second use of the word when not only when judgment comes but on that day on that future day when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints to be marveled at among those who have believed because our testimony to you was believed comfort church believers in the lord jesus christ you have a commendation from god and when he comes you will be glorified in him and through him notice the way that prayer ends verse 11 and 12 and i'm almost in my seat 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 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 may the god who considers you worthy continue to make you worthy until you see him face to face may the god who considers you worthy fulfill or complete all of his plans for you even in the midst of suffering may the god who loves you so in that day be glorified in you that's that's the way the song ends glory glory hallelujah his truth is marching on and with the conclusion then of this chapter paul has said to the church in the! the! boast to others about you god's commendation rests upon you march on march on his comfort and glory will yet be made manifest in you our heavenly father i pray for every christian here who feels the afflictions of the world or by standing up for you has endured even in small measure the sufferings of our christ may they be strengthened by your letter of commendation until we see you face to face and our lord for those who have come today! [33 : 39] and have wondered how in the world they would come to a belief in God where judgment comes I pray that they would escape it by running to Jesus save even today all who run to the cross and strengthen all those who suffer for his name we pray this in Jesus name amen