

Worthy of His Calling

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[0 : 00] Well now if you would take the Bible from the seat and turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 on page 989. As you do that, you should know the water in the baptism tank is a little warmer today, although it was still very cold at 9 o'clock.

And Dan Gifford rang me in the week and asked to borrow my wetsuit. So he did the baptisms at 9 o'clock and when the kids, I think we had 7 children, baptised, the look on the kids' faces was one of shock and awe.

And Dan kept smiling. So I just want to say at St John's, we still believe that the amount of water in baptism is irrelevant, but the temperature is important.

As I told the 9 o'clock congregation, in some parts of Russia, the Orthodox Church baptises all their people on one day in the middle of winter outside on a river. And the elders go out the night before and they build a fire and they saw a hole in the ice and everyone has to go down and up.

So just be very grateful you live in Vancouver. Well now, it's great seeing people baptised, isn't it? I just want to point out to you that you have said some very serious things this morning.

[1 : 23] You know, we've prayed that these people would die to sin, that they would be raised with Christ, that they would serve Him for the rest of our lives. And as we turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, this passage explains why.

I think this is one of the most grave passages in all the Bible. And I think at the end of it we ought to tremble, both with fear and with joy at the same time.

If you haven't been with us, at this Christmas season we've been looking at these two very early letters from the Apostle Paul to the church in Thessalonica. And the Christians, it's a great group of people.

They were full of joy, they were full of love and they were under extremely difficult circumstances. They were suffering physical abuse, oppression, injustice and persecution just because they were Christians.

So Paul wrote the first letter of encouragement and between the first letter and the second letter the persecution has only got worse. This is a persecuted minority and they are suffering injustice.

[2 : 43] So just look back at verses 3 and 4. We ought always, Paul says, to give thanks to God for you brothers and sisters. This is right because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Therefore we boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions you're enduring. Please notice what Paul doesn't say.

He doesn't thank God just for their endurance and steadfastness. He thanks God for their growing faith and their increasing love for one another in steadfastness under persecution.

Isn't that interesting? Because endurance by itself and being steadfast in suffering by itself is of no use to anyone if it's divorced from faith, growing faith and growing love.

It is possible to be stoical and strong in the face of suffering while harbouring deep inner hatred and resentment and thoughts and plans of revenge. It's also possible to endure suffering with a grim determination and have your faith shrink and your love decrease.

[3 : 57] It's not very attractive and it's no good for you and it's no good for those around you. The Thessalonians here, their growing faith is like a tree. It's inside. It's flourishing.

It's organic growth. And their love is increasing like a flood to one another, everyone to one another. And I think if we could raise the Thessalonian church from the dead and bring them here this morning, you know what they would say to us?

They would have a question for us. They would say this, St. John's, are you suffering well? Are you using your suffering to grow in faith and in love or are you wasting it?

I think it's a call to examine ourselves. It's a call to examine ourselves to see if we are growing in love and in faith. Because you know, of course, as a Christian, there's no such thing as marking time and staying still.

In our troubles, let's ask ourselves these questions. In our own troubles, no matter what they are, are we increasingly bearing witness to the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ?

[5 : 04] I mean, if you've joined us, let's say you joined us 12 months ago, could you look back on this last year and say about us that we love, every one of you is increasing in love for one another?

Do you trust God more than you did in August? I know, it's a bit hard to tell that. Because you see, the real test in Christian suffering is not whether we grind on.

It's not just that. It's whether in our suffering, our faith increases and our love grows. Because these things don't come from human effort. They don't come without human effort.

But in the end, they are the proof that God is in us and is working. That God is sustaining us in affliction, burning away all those things that are unworthy, giving us a greater focus on the person and preciousness of Jesus Christ.

And that's why the New Testament always looks at suffering in a different way than we do.

Remember back in Acts chapter 5 when the apostles had been preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ and they were hauled before the temple, the clergy and the...

[6 : 12] I'm not going to say bishops. And they were commanded not to preach anymore and they were flogged and let go.

And in the text it says, they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. So what is it that changes the suffering and affliction from being just something that we endure?

What is it that changes that so that it becomes an opportunity to become like Christ? What is it that changes difficulty and injustice so that we might grow in patience and have a sense of privilege?

It is this. It is the fact that Jesus Christ is coming to judge the living and the dead. And that is the core teaching of both of these letters to the Thessalonians.

And it's so deep and it's so rich. The apostle is teaching us three words. Remember two weeks ago in chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians, the coming of Jesus, he said, is the parousia.

[7 : 19] It's the presence of Jesus. And he said, what that means for us now is that we don't grieve like other people. We grieve, but we grieve with hope. And last week, Dan took us through chapter 5.

And the word there for the coming was the day of the Lord. And what that means now is that we live as children of the day. We belong to that day. And here in this chapter, the big Bible word for the day of judgment is the word revealing.

Look down at verse 7, please. God will grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.

The apostle is speaking about the end of history. It's the end of the existing order. It will be the revelation of Jesus Christ. And here is the amazing thing. This passage is one of the few passages in the scriptures that speak about what happens to people after that day.

the destiny of those who obey the gospel and the destiny of those who do not. It will be the revealing of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 28] Remember at Christmas, the first time Jesus came, it was in weakness. It was local. It was veiled. It wasn't headline news. But when Jesus comes the second time, we've learned his coming will be in power.

It will be global, cosmic and all will see. He will be revealed. And the word doesn't mean just some little intellectual insight. The word means something that's been covered.

It's there, but it's covered and we can't see it. And the cover comes off and it is immediately and unmistakably present to us. And this, of course, refers to the person of Jesus Christ.

Since the resurrection of Jesus, he has been seated at the Father's right hand and ruling all things, but it's hidden from sight, isn't it? That's why people think Jesus is irrelevant.

But on that day, on the day of his coming, God will disclose Jesus in all his glory for all to see. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh will see it together.

[9 : 34] So it's going to be a day unlike any other day. No spectators, no cell phones. I'm sorry. What's going to happen?

Well, Paul focuses our attention around two things, the establishing of two things. There's going to be the establishment of true justice and the establishment of true glory.

I want to look at those together for just a moment. Firstly, true justice. I don't need to point out to you that our world is out of joint. We live in a world where children are trafficked.

Where, as the Bible says, the righteous die young and poor and the wicked die old and healthy. But in that day, the day of Revelation, Christ will establish the true justice, the true righteousness, the true equity that belongs to God.

He will uncover everything that is covered and there will be judgment. judgment. I once had lunch with a judge downtown, not during a court case.

[10:40] And I said, what do you do? What do you actually do? He said, I judge. And I followed him out into the court and he did that. But his judgment in that case was he thought the guy had done it but there wasn't enough evidence.

It is not going to be like that. Now, I know as soon as I start speaking about judgment we all get a little bit itchy. We live on the west coast of Canada and the west coast of Canada is a little cultural enclave.

It's a kind of a distillation of western values. We're like a social experiment here in Vancouver, aren't we? And we love some of the teaching of the Bible. We love the teaching of the Bible about turning the other cheek.

We don't have any problem believing that God is a God of love and that he'll forgive us. But the one thing God's not allowed to do is judge us. That's deeply offensive. But, of course, we are, like everyone, products of our culture.

If you go to non-western cultures it's very different. Turning the other cheek makes no sense whatsoever. They don't have any difficulty believing that God is a God of judge.

[11:49] With a great sense of injustice they long for God to come and to judge and the one thing that God is not allowed to do is just to freely forgive people. That's deeply offensive.

Where's the justice in that? And don't you think it's the height of Western arrogance to think that our view is superior? Well, I point that out simply because every time the gospel comes into a culture it will offend at some point or other.

This is just the point at which it offends our culture. But because it comes from God it always proclaims a God who is love and a God who is just. In his wonderful book Exclusion and Embrace Miroslav Volf who is a Croatian Christian writer theologian who was witness to some of the horrors of the violence in the Balkans he writes this If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence that God would not be worthy of worship.

The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God. He says my thesis is that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance that will be unpopular with many in the West but it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of a thesis that human non-violence results from the belief in a God's refusal to judge.

You following? In a sun-scorched land soaked in the blood of the innocents it will invariably die with other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind. Now you don't have to go all the way with him on that but he's simply saying we cannot practice non-violence we cannot turn the other cheek we cannot suffer in justice and grow in faith and love unless we believe that God is passionately concerned about justice and will bring an end to all injustice and that's what this passage is teaching we'll have a look at it in just a second that on that day God will implement he will apply his perfect justice.

[13:57] Now I'm sorry about this but it doesn't come across so well in the English translation. In the Greek the word just right righteous justice justice they all come from the same root and the translators of our version have translated that same root four different ways just to keep us on our toes.

So let me show you the verses in verse 5 Paul speaks about the righteous judgment that's the right word just word verse 6 he says God is God is just and he will repay affliction to those who afflict you he's going to reverse all injustice and he's offering it to us so that we would take refuge in the justice and judgment of God God we're used to taking refuge in the love of God but here we're supposed to take refuge in the judgment of God in verse 8 when Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance John Stott calls this an unfortunate translation I think he's right it sounds kind of spiteful and vindictive doesn't it well the two Greek words inflicting is simply giving and vengeance is this same word in other words when Christ is revealed he will come giving

a righteous judgment a sentence not settling private scores but a clean and complete administration of justice according to truth with all the facts set before him truth in sentencing if you like and then in verse 9 the fourth occurrence is the word punishment they will suffer the punishment again it's literally the right or just sentence so on that day when Christ judges not one being will be able to say what he has done is wrong we will all worship him for his righteousness and that day there will be no appeal there is no half justice no hidden evidence it will be the final dealing with evil how does this relate to Christian suffering well on the one hand in the old testament it was God who judges and the surprise for us here

I think is that it is the person of Jesus Christ who is coming judge the same Jesus who came that first Christmas in weakness as a child who died and rose when he is revealed everything will be laid bare every injustice every wrong will be dealt with in perfect righteousness and when he is revealed all who really belong to him will be revealed and that's what's behind persecution those who abuse and oppress the people of God do so because of what they think of Jesus Christ if you want to know someone's true opinion of Jesus look at how they treat his people Jesus said as he did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters you did it to me to touch a Christian is to touch Jesus and while it looks like God is doing nothing now he is delaying that day of judgment so more people would come to repentance

I want to say this the injustices and the sins and the evil that we have committed are either paid for by Jesus or paid for by us and the reason that God is holding back that day is so that many more will come to repentance and just think about who's writing this I mean this is Paul the persecutor of the church formerly a man who ravaged the church and set Christians to death and if God can bring someone like that to repentance none of us is beyond his reach so when he is revealed on that day he will establish true righteousness and secondly when he is revealed he will establish true glory did you notice as we read through the passage as Bev read it through for us that it's very reticent on the details what we find is in verse 7 on that day Jesus will be revealed from heaven which is where he is now with his angels of power in flaming fire the same fire that Moses saw in the burning bush the same fire that led the people of Israel in the tabernacle the same fire that descended on the disciples on the day of Pentecost in the spirit and he will descend verse 8 giving justice giving right sentence to those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus

Paul is not dealing with the question of those who've never heard but those who know the gospel who refuse to repent and refuse to see the glory of God in Jesus Christ so what's going to happen when Jesus is revealed is what also will be revealed is our true connection with him and we're not going to be judged just for doing bad things we've all done bad things if you're not a Christian something very important Christians don't claim to be better than other people the essence of sin is not naughtiness the essence of sin is what we do with the person of Jesus Christ whether we worship him as Lord or treat him as irrelevant and the punishment is described here very clearly and I just this is very serious stuff verse 9 they will suffer the just sentence of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might the word destruction interesting word it does not mean annihilation it does not mean people are going to be forced into extinction and obliterated it is defined by the second half of the verse there's no comma there in the original the focus is on the separation from God and his glory they will be deprived of his glory forever they refuse his glory in this life

[20 : 16] God will give them what they choose this is the essence of divine punishment if the essence of heaven is fellowship with God seeing his glory forever then the essence of hell is being away from God and away from his glory forever remember in chapter 4 we will be with the Lord forever therefore hell is not being with the Lord forever if heaven is to participate in his glory hell is not participating in his glory if heaven is being transformed by the glory of God hell is to not be transformed he is a very grave you see sin separates us from the presence of God and if we choose to be separated in this life we set the trajectory for our life beyond the grave because God takes our decisions very very seriously it is not going to happen that on that day

Jesus will casually cast people away and they'll cry out no no no let me stay I want to be with you no no no they will cling to their choices they will defend their choices they'll continue to think that they are right Tim Keller who's a great apologist has drawn together some quotes from C.S. Lewis and let me read you this little paragraph hell begins with a grumbling mood always complaining always blaming others but you are still distinct from it you may even criticise it in yourself and wish you could stop it but there may come a day when you can do no longer then there will be no you left

to criticise the mood or even enjoy it but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine Lewis says it's not a question of God sending us to hell in each of us there's something growing which will be hell unless it's nipped in the bud there's a terrible seriousness to our choices here in this life and the Bible never offers a second chance after death the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is God's final word to humanity and our choice here and now in this life will be made final on that day we cannot say we've not been warned but I hope you are feeling that although this is warning the weight of the passage is not on the warning the emphasis is not on the unhappiness of that day because the great preoccupation of Jesus when he is revealed is not going to be dealing with those who reject him but it is the joy of gathering us into his glory forever that is the emphasis of the scriptures when the scripture speaks about the judgment of God it calls it his alien work it only exists because of our rebellion to him and you couldn't see a sharper contrast than between verses 9 and 11 sorry 9 and 10 just look down after speaking about being cast out of the presence of the Lord verse 10 when he comes on that day why to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at in all who have believed because our testimony to you was believed this is just amazing in 1st Thessalonians when the glory of Jesus appears it is objective outside of us what the apostle is speaking about here is subjective inside of us it's not that Jesus comes and we will spectate his glory it's not that he will be glorified among his people or by his people it's in us he's speaking about a great transformation that happens in our resurrection where our bodies will be made like his glorious body because when he appears we will be made like him I think this is almost too good to believe when he comes when he appears he's going to share his glory with us and the best illustration I found of this was in John

Stott of a filament in a light globe and I was told well we don't use light globes anymore we use those fluorescent things and there's someone in this congregation who can tell you that they have a worse carbon footprint than the old incandescent globes Jack Tippett where are you he's up the back but that's a distraction let me get back on the point like a filament in a globe on that day when we see Christ and our bodies are raised we will be incandescent with the glory of Jesus Christ like on the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus' body became a vehicle for his glory that's going to happen to us I think it's almost too much and that's why the next phrase that Jesus will be marveled at in his saints he will be marveled at in each other this is a great word it's a word used in the [25 : 32] Gospels to describe the human reaction to Jesus' miracles when he walks on the water or raises the dead it's something totally beyond human categories it's something that happens that is utterly impossible it's something that's from the God side of reality transcending everything that's going to happen to us all that on the day Jesus is revealed from heaven and if anyone thinks that heaven is going to be boring you're in for a big shock because he's going to establish his righteousness and he's going to establish his glory well what does it mean for us now and again it's nice that the Apostle Paul makes the application for us isn't it verses 11 and 12 to this end the Apostle says we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and he 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 now and you in him according to the grace of our

Lord our God and Lord Jesus Christ Christ now I just want to point out Christianity is not about a ticket into heaven it's about life now it's about how we live now and Paul connects the future to the present through prayer the way we live out our faith now is important the way that we live in this world of injustice that's mostly blind to the glory of Jesus here's something you should pray that God would make us worthy of his calling that he would fulfill every good resolve that the name of Jesus might be glorified now who do you pray for you husbands do you pray for your wives what do you pray for them don't just pray God bless her he's already blessed her because you're her husband here are some things to specifically pray for your wife or for your children that God would make them worthy of his calling that

God would fulfill every good resolve and every work of faith by his power and that the name of Jesus Christ would be glorified now the worthiness thing is great because none of us are worthy of his calling none of us are none of us were when God called us we were all equally unworthy but God doesn't leave us there he begins a process of transformation in us where we change from one degree of glory to another another another way of saying we become more like Jesus we grow in faith we increase in love until the day when Jesus appears and he does the whole thing and knowing that he is coming to draw us into his marvelous glory means we resolve now to do good to put our faith to work to make a difference in the world so do you have a resolve to do good is there

any good that you have a resolve to do well the passage is saying do it do you have a work of faith in mind that God that

God has put on your heart that you could do and nobody else could do do it for the glory of Jesus because the whole purpose of life is to glorify him and enjoy him forever and the central good we are to do in this life is to know Jesus Christ to love Jesus Christ to obey the gospel to answer his call to welcome one another to promote his glory to yearn for his coming not to waste our lives but to use them for him so that he might receive all the honor and glory that is due amen well let's kneel and pray that Jesus would come again thank you so much for