

## 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12 (PM)

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[ 0 : 00 ] It would be very helpful if you had a Bible open in front of you. That's the Black Book, page 289, I think.

Because 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 is a very uncomfortable text. So it would be helpful to see what's in there. It's a text that, let's be honest, does not feel very Christmassy.

I don't think any of us are going to receive a Christmas card. 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 7 or verse 9 in it. I thought about making one as a joke. It would have taken too much time.

I think it would have been worth it. This is an uncomfortable text because it's about Jesus' second coming. But more than that, it's emphatic on his justice.

It's about the final judgment by the King of Kings. The same Jesus who was born on that silent holy night in Bethlehem will now come again to judge the living and the dead.

[ 1 : 12 ] And the choice of what we will eternally experience, we are told is ours to make. Will you choose glory and goodness with God or wrath and destruction as you are cast away from him?

See, God doesn't force us to love him, to know him, to believe and obey him through the gospel of his son, Jesus. But God does want us to understand the gravity of our choice.

How you respond to Jesus in this life will have for you eternal consequences. Because he is going to return.

And when he does, he will judge all of us. And so all of us must be ready to receive him. Whenever I don't know what to say on a topic, I do a Google search if J.I. Packer ever spoke on that topic.

And he did. He wrote a book called Concise Theology. I think as a preacher you could do a lot worse than that. And this is what Packer wrote. He said, See, since God is good and desires to show us mercy, not wrath, he reveals to us what's coming so that we may repent and believe and be saved.

[ 2 : 52 ] He wants us to be ready for Jesus' return. Packer again says, New Testament teaching about hell is meant to appall us and strike us dumb with horror, assuring us that as heaven will be better than we could dream, so hell will be worse than we can conceive.

I find as Christians we love to celebrate that Christ offers everyone who believes in him salvation. He saves us. He rescues us.

But we're embarrassed or awkward about speaking about what Christ is saving us from. And tonight's text gives us a glimpse of where unbelief and disobedience will ultimately lead.

But the focus of our passage tonight is not primarily about heaven or hell, despite the fact that those are the verses that we fixate on when we hear the text read.

The focus of the passage is on the justice of God, the justness of God. It's about God's righteousness. And we see that because the focus of our passage is a person.

[ 4 : 07 ] It's on God's righteous judge, his son Jesus. We're told the king of the kingdom of heaven is coming here, and the reason he comes is to establish justice and righteousness on the earth.

The word justice is found four times in our passage. Just quickly look at verse 5. Your persecutions, Paul writes, are evidence of the righteous judgment of God.

That word judgment is the word justice. Verse 6. God considers it just to repay those who afflict you with affliction.

Verse 7. The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with the angels of his might in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance. Vengeance. The word for vengeance in the original language has justice as its root.

It means that Jesus is coming to work out justice, to establish justice, to deliver justice. That's what vengeance is. And finally, in verse 9, this is the scary verse that's not on a Christmas card.

[ 5 : 17 ] Those who reject God and do not obey Jesus' gospel will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction. Again, the word punishment has the same root word in it, justice.

The enemies of God will receive their just reward. The just wages of sin is death. So four times in our passage, the word justice is used in four different ways.

God's justice means his judgment in verse 5, his justness in verse 6, his will to work out justice in verse 7, and his resolve to carry out just sentencing in verse 9.

See, it's all about the justice of God, the absolute eternal justice that Jesus will bring. And this is good news because there's a longing in every human heart for justice because it is so elusive all over the earth.

Think of the cries for justice in the world right now. On the four ends of the earth, there are unjust wars, unjust violence and aggression, repressive regimes, unjust laws that are repressing women or legalizing the murder of the most vulnerable.

[ 6 : 35 ] There are old institutional evils like racism and bigotry and abuse that have not been adequately dealt with despite our attempts at truth and reconciliation.

Many of you, maybe all of you, are victims of injustice in one form or another. There's injustice everywhere, and so we long for justice because we see injustice everywhere on the earth. Our hearts are yearning for what only Jesus can provide. Advent is about awaiting the coming Prince of Peace.

We are awaiting the one who will put the world right. We're longing for justice, whether we realize it or not. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, we read about the unveiling of Jesus as the Lord and Judge on that final day and about how he will bring justice.

He will deliver a final righteous judgment over all the earth. His judgment will determine all of our eternal destinies because he comes to judge everyone.

[ 7 : 52 ] Every person who has ever lived will be raised to go and give an account of their life before the risen, reigning, just Jesus, King of kings, the Lord of lords, surrounded by his angelic host, his glory and power and purity blazing like fire before us.

And we're told that every person who has ever lived will receive one of two judgments. This is where we're now going to focus on tonight. There are two options for us in the final judgment of Jesus, the just judge.

The first judgment starts in verse 7. Listen. The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with angels full of his might in blazing fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

This is one of the most devastating verses in the Bible. For many of you, it's probably enough to prompt you to stop listening, to swipe to the next video, to say to yourself, I refuse to ever believe in or obey a God who would inflict vengeance on his enemies.

How can a good God send people to hell? We think that God's goodness and his justice are incompatible.

[ 9 : 25 ] Surely a good God must always forgive. Surely a good God would never inflict vengeance, as our passage claims. And so many conclude that a God of judgment is not good.

But what our passage shows us is the exact opposite is true. God's justice is why he is good. The last judgment is the proof of his goodness, his righteousness.

If God won't judge evil, then he is not good. Think about if we lived in a society where criminals were not punished, where laws were not defended or upheld, where the vulnerable were not protected from predators.

If Canada were a place where dictators and murderers and rapists and racists could live totally unchecked, totally unresisted, with no consequences for their willful evil, then we could not say that our country is good.

It's good to judge evil. It's good to uphold what is right and to oppose what is wrong. The places on earth where there is no judgment against evil are the places of the deepest evil.

[ 10 : 41 ] in the same way, if God did not judge evil, then we could not call him good. So the final judgment is therefore the ultimate proof that he is good.

He's just. Justice and righteousness will reign in his kingdom. He comes to banish the darkness by the radiance of his goodness. So we shouldn't be embarrassed of the idea of God being a God of judgment or of justice.

Because if he weren't just, he would not be good. Verse 8 tells us that Jesus the judge will inflict vengeance. Remember, the root of that word vengeance is justice.

Vengeance means worked out justice. So it's saying Jesus will uphold and work out justice against the agents of evil. Jesus is not coming in an uncontrolled, murderous fury against the wicked.

This is not for telling Jesus slaughtering, unsuspecting bystanders like a shooter in a school. This is the all-knowing, all-wise, all-righteous God working out justice, establishing justice, righting wrongs rightly.

[ 12 : 05 ] The word vengeance is the same word used of a judge deciding a case and sentencing the guilty party. Judges are objective, not emotive.

They review the facts and they should make a fair judgment and sentence. Jesus will work out justice, punishing evildoers justly.

This is not an overt reaction. It will be totally fair. Paul is writing to Christians who are being persecuted for their faith and he writes that the people afflicting the Christians will be afflicted. These enemies of God and the gospel will receive the righteous judgment and justice that they deserve. That's good news because remember, a good God is not good if they will not defend goodness.

The justice and righteousness that all of us long for, one day God will deliver in full through the judgment of all that is evil because he is good. We see the form this judgment will take in verse 9.

[ 13 : 14 ] We're told they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Evil will be destroyed.

The punishment of all evil will be eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might. This sounds harsh, doesn't it?

It sounds too harsh. It offends all of our sensibilities. But we must understand the reality of evil.

Evil cannot be allowed to persist if God's kingdom of righteousness is to reign over the earth. This picture of punishment, of eternal destruction elsewhere is called hell.

It's the reality of being sent away from the presence of the Lord. Sent away from the good God who made us and loves us. Sent away from the source of all light and life.

[ 14 : 21 ] Sent away from all blessing, all righteousness, all peace, all goodness. Evil and those who commit it cannot coexist in God's presence.

They will be eternally destroyed. And this is the choice of everyone who rejects the gospel of Jesus Christ. People who refuse to believe, refuse to repent, refuse to follow Jesus have already opted out of living in light of God's presence.

They've already chosen hell for themselves, already decided they want to live not with God but away from him. The final judgment is God simply giving the unbeliever what they've already chosen for themselves.

Jesus says as much in John 3. In John 3 we have this incredibly famous beautiful verse that all of us know. God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God didn't send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him isn't condemned. But now listen to what Jesus says.

[ 15 : 41 ] But whoever does not believe is condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only son of God and this is the judgment.

The light has come into the world but the people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. See, the people who are sentenced to suffer the punishment of eternal destruction have already chosen it for themselves.

God is just giving them what they've already chosen. It's totally fair. It's totally just. The people who hated God's life God's light and wanted to live away from God in darkness doing evil will dwell in darkness forever.

He'll give them what they want. In Matthew 24 our first reading when Jesus tells of us his second coming he describes how he'll come in the full glory of God and the response of the nations will be to mourn.

Did you notice that? Why? Well, it's because in that moment on that day all people will see the radiance and beauty and glory of God on display in his son and they will know in that instant that they've rejected him.

[17:08] They refuse to know him. They refuse to obey him instead choosing their own way rather than his way and at that moment they will see that he is the only way to the father.

He is the only way to a glory beyond all imagining and because they fail to know God and obey his son they'll never see his glory again. They'll never know his life.

On that last day they will see the light when they see Christ but it'll be too late because they've already chosen the darkness and so to the eternal darkness they will go.

Who are the people who will suffer this punishment? Verse 8 answers that question. This punishment will fall on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Two groups of people who are really the same group of people will be condemned to eternal destruction. First those who do not know God.

[18:14] Now this cannot mean people who have never heard of God because it wouldn't be just for God to judge people for rejecting him if they never had a chance to hear and receive his gospel.

Rather the word know here must mean people who are culpably ignorant. People who never wanted to know God and so they never sought after him. People who intentionally avoided knowing God.

It must mean people who saw the light and decided they instead wanted to remain in the darkness. People who willfully refuse to seek and find and know the Lord.

The second group of people who will stand condemned are the people who refuse to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Faith is proven by her works.

The fruit of faith is the transformation into the image of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit renewing you from within. The way to know if a person is saved is to see the fruit of Jesus the fruit of his spirit in them to see them obeying the gospel and being transformed by it.

[19:34] See, we're not just called by Jesus to believe but also to repent, to turn away from evil and to instead do good, to leave living in the darkness and to walk toward God's light, to obey Jesus as our Lord, our Master, to deny ourselves, to follow him.

Those who refuse to obey him he will refuse to receive on that last day. Now, if you're worried right now, as I suspect every single one of us is, that you aren't saved, this is evidence of God's spirit alive in you, turning you now to Jesus, directing you to him that you may be saved and sanctified by his grace and power.

The very fact that you are concerned right now is proof that Christ is in you. So cling to him, believe in him, and out of gratitude for what he has done for you, strive to obey him as your Lord.

So that's the first, that's the heavy one, of the two possible judgments by Jesus on the last day.

Those who do not want to know God and refuse to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.

The second, much briefer, alternative judgment begins in verse 10. He comes in that day, we're told, to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

[21:22] Jesus comes not just to judge, but to share his glory with his people. Glory as of the Father, full of grace and truth, glory that God shares with no other.

Jesus now comes to share with those who he has set apart. The word for glory is unusual here, because the author has added the prefix in.

God will come to him. He will come to him. He will come that day to be glorified in his saints.

Christ will be further glorified by the gloriousness of his people, who will radiate his glory back to him. Jesus comes to further God's glory, by showing how his gospel of grace can take sinners and turn them into saints, radiating the glory of God.

What awaits Jesus' saints is an abounding, flourishing, radiating, loving, glorious life, spent sharing in the glories of God, in full radiance and his righteous Son.

[22:42] This is what his saints are anticipating. This is the hope that's unfolding before us, first at Christmas, at that initial coming of Christ, but now fully realized in his second coming, when his people will now be inglorified in him.

This image is not like saints holding up a mirror to just reflect Jesus' glory. Rather, it's like Jesus' people are the filament of a light bulb, which upon his coming will receive his glory.

His glory will pulse through his people like electricity through a light bulb, radiating his glory and filling all of us and warming us and transforming us into the very image of Christ, by Christ himself.

That's what awaits those who believe in Jesus. It surpasses all understanding. Who are his saints? Kind of a churchy word.

The word saint just means holy one, or rather one who is set apart, one who stands out. A saint is a person who God has set apart by his grace.

[ 23 : 51 ] It's a person who knows God through his Son. It's a person who strives to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. A saint is a sinner, just like the first group who were judged to suffer punishment.

But a saint is a sinner who's been saved, not by their own holiness, but by trusting in the holiness of Christ, who endured the cross to forgive our sins.

And if you believe in Christ, then you know God. And if you know God, then you will strive to obey our Lord Jesus' gospel. And when you fail, and you will, you confess and repent and return to the Lord, knowing that you are saved by his grace and one day will be filled with his glory when he returns.

Friends, this Advent, prepare your hearts for the coming of heaven's king. Let the reality of God's justice and the last judgment frame your life.

You've heard these words of God, and your eternity now depends on how you respond to them. Will you run away from the light? Will you actively avoid God, refusing to obey Jesus and instead living in injustice and evil?

[ 25 : 17 ] Or will you receive him? Will you repent and believe? Will you know God and obey his son? And will you look forward for the day when his glory will radiate through you and with all his people for all eternity?

This Advent, get ready for Christ's coming. Let every heart prepare him room. Amen.