

August 17, 2025 (Lesson 12)

LIVE IN LIGHT OF COMING JUDGMENT

1. **Exemplify Hope in Persecution** (2 Thessalonians 1:1-6)
2. **Prepare for the Coming Judgment** (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10)
3. **Live in the Power of God** (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

Central Truth: The hope of Christ's return should embolden us to live for Him.

Focus: Recognize and proclaim that God's love and justice will prevail.

Evangelism Emphasis: Christians should focus on proclaiming the Gospel in both word and deed.

Golden Text: "We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power" (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

The church at Thessalonica was a good church, but it was not a perfect one; there is no such thing. Every church must overcome problems, and every congregation has people who are not living at the level of maturity required to maintain the absence of all conflicts. Misunderstandings can occur even between the most sincere and mature of saints. This is the nature of humanity and the problem of communication (or lack of it). However, just because there are disagreements does not mean there is a lack of love and sense of community.

Paul was probably writing to clear up some problems Timothy observed or answer questions the church had asked during his visit. Obeying Paul's instruction would enable the congregation to love in a manner consistent with the nature of the Kingdom. This information is still needed in the contemporary church. It is profitable for the purposes of discipleship and motivation. Instruction in the Word must be incorporated, not just received. We usually have more knowledge than we act upon. In other words, we know more than we are doing.

We must also keep in mind that we will be judged for our actions. In a letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10 NIV).

The believers from the first-century church at Thessalonica will appear before Christ's judgment seat, and so will we as twenty-first-century believers. Knowing this, we must live in light of coming judgment.

1. EXEMPLIFY HOPE IN PERSECUTION

A. Growing in Faith (2 Thessalonians 1:1-3)

¹ Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: ² Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.

The opening of 2 Thessalonians is very similar to that of the first letter. The ministry trio of Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy, who were partners in ministry to the Thessalonians, reminded the congregation that they are the church or community of Christ. They had been called and established through the plan of God and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. As such, they are partners with the ministry trio, but more importantly they are partners with the triune God.

In his previous letter, Paul had offered thanks for the faith and love evident in this congregation. Since the first epistle, there had been ongoing development in each area. They had not plateaued or regressed in their faith as a result of the difficult circumstances they were facing. Just the opposite occurred—there had been vigorous growth in their faith.

Let us pause to note the results of persecution. It weeds out the insincere and causes suffering and loss. However, throughout the history of Christ's church, persecution has often spurred growth even when believers have been forced underground.

Verses 3-10 comprise one sentence in the Greek and form one complex unit of thought. It begins with thanksgiving offered to God (v. 3). Paul felt indebted ("bound") and compelled ("it is fitting," NKJV) to offer thanks. To refrain from doing so would be wrong. God deserved praise

because of the congregation's conduct and maturity. Their faith (commitment and maturity) had grown and increased beyond measure, and the unselfish love ("charity") of each of them had grown vigorously and superabundantly. The desires Paul had for them and for which he prayed were being fulfilled in the entire congregation (see 1 Thess. 3:10, 12). They still had problems which he would address later (2 Thess. 1:6-12); however, they were approaching the problems in a manner consistent with the example of Jesus and those who were over them in the Lord.

Choosing God's Will

To choose to suffer means there is something wrong; to choose God's will even if it means suffering is a very different thing. No healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he chooses God's will, as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not.—Oswald Chambers

B. Trusting God's Justice (2 Thessalonians 1:4-6)

⁴ So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: ⁵ Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: ⁶ Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you.

Paul could speak with special spiritual pride ("glory in") to other churches of the Thessalonians' perseverance and trust ("patience and faith," v. 4). They had not passively matured in the faith, as maturity does not come without intentionality; rather, they had pressed forward deliberately in spite of "persecutions and tribulations" (sufferings because of their faith, and trials of every sort that result in pressure).

The Thessalonians' steadfast faith in the face of adversity was proof of God's righteous judgment (1:5). Judgment is not viewed in the Western legal sense of determination of and punishment for a crime that breaks the law, but the implementation of true justice. God, as the One who implements justice for the disenfranchised (those outside the attention and care of this world),

had actively observed their suffering, empowered them to endure, and would vindicate their determined faithfulness. Because they had been faithful, they were regarded as deserving (“counted worthy of”) the Kingdom. It is, after all, because of the Kingdom that they were suffering. The idea here is not that they merited or earned the Kingdom, but that God had been with them throughout the entire process to bring them to His goal.

In 1 Thessalonians, the congregation had been informed believers are “appointed” to suffering (3:3). Suffering is not viewed as punishment from God, but a method whereby God produces character and maturity in believers. God delivers us from the world, but not out of the world. This means the ideals, values, problems, persecution, and oppression associated with the world affect Christians in one manner or another. Faith is not viewed as something that must be shielded from hardship, but rather something fashioned and forged in the fire and heat of adversity. Immanuel (“God with us now”) is always present to guard, empower, and deliver His people and see that justice is administered.

God in His righteous justice will “recompense” with affliction those who afflict His own (2 Thess. 1:6). It can happen now and in the world to come. God’s greatest retribution will occur when Jesus returns to earth with His mighty angels. Unprecedented judgment will be poured on His adversaries.

—How can a church endure persecution and other trials? What is the benefit of those experiences?

2. PREPARE FOR THE COMING JUDGMENT

A. Rest and Retribution (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

⁷ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Many individuals emphasize the love of God while overlooking His vengeance against sin and the sinner. His grace and mercy will not continue indefinitely. A day of accounting will come when Christ returns with justice. This will be in contrast to the current world where evil not only is prevalent but also prospers. When surveying history, there are many political and military leaders who have disregarded human life while attempting to satisfy personal desires and accumulate vast holdings of land and wealth. They have brought tremendous suffering and thousands of deaths. When those tyrants die, the story for them has not ended.

God's vengeance must not be seen as a form of vindictiveness which characterizes some humans. Rather, it is God's justice being brought against those who choose sin rather than the righteousness of God. Anyone who does not follow the gospel of Jesus Christ will be the recipient of divine judgment.

Verse 9 indicates the extent of the punishment from a time perspective. It will not last for a short period of time and then be over. The guilty will not simply be annihilated. Instead, they will experience eternal destruction—a total separation from God forever. However, it will be more than never being able to experience the presence of God. Matthew 25:46 states the future of the unrighteous: “They will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (NIV). In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man speaks of being “in agony in this fire” (Luke 16:24 NIV). Revelation 21:8 describes the place of eternal punishment as “the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (NIV).

When Christ comes in judgment, unbelievers will experience the glorious power of God in a destructive sense. But we as believers will continue to experience His glorious power as children of the heavenly Father.

Safe From the Fire

During pioneer days when a prairie fire would rage and outrun even the fastest horses, they took a match and burned the grass in a designated area around them. Then they would take their stand in the burned area and be safe from the threatening fire. As the roar of the flames approached, they would not be afraid. Even as the ocean of fire surged around them there was no fear, because fire had already passed over the place where they stood (*Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*).

B. Grace and Glory (2 Thessalonians 1:10)

¹⁰ When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

The return of Christ will be a day of terror and judgment for unbelievers, but for believers it will be a day of unimaginable glorification as we fully experience the power and righteousness of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus will be glorified *in* and *on* the basis of “his saints” (the holy or called-out ones), who will wonder and marvel at His person, presence, provision, and power (v. 10). The saints will enter into Christ’s presence because they accepted the witness of those who testified of their faith through word and deed, whether they were apostles or people in the pew.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians their participation in this marvelous event is the result of choosing to believe the Gospel. Each person reading this epistle or hearing it read probably was carried back to the time they turned from an idolatrous, sinful life and embraced Jesus as Savior and Lord.

From a practical personal perspective, we need to be reminded that our witnessing the glory of Christ’s return is based on our having made a conscious choice to follow Jesus Christ.

Christ’s Glorious Return

Our Lord did great miracles during His earthly ministry and now sits at the right hand of power (Mark 14:62). Therefore, at His glorious return, we expect an extraordinary manifestation of supernatural power. The power of God, which raised Jesus from the dead, will also raise those who are dead in Christ, and all believers will be caught up to be with the Lord. His lordship, which He entered into at His death and resurrection, will be manifested.—French L. Arrington

3. LIVE IN THE POWER OF GOD

A. Counted as Worthy (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

¹¹ Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: ¹² That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When reading the Apostle Paul's letters to the various churches, we see his intense desire for them to grow in Christ. He is a spiritual parent who constantly had their interests at heart. For that reason, Paul regularly included the Thessalonians and other believers in his prayers.

This prayer is not simply, "Lord, bless and keep them." Instead, Paul includes some specifics which he desired for the individuals in this congregation. First was their being worthy of God's calling. "Calling" here does not refer to one's vocation or going to a particular location. Rather, it is God's calling individuals to salvation. No one is worthy of receiving God's marvelous gift of salvation. However, after receiving Christ, it becomes our opportunity and obligation to do everything in our power to live pleasing in the sight of God.

Second is fulfilling God's resolve or purpose in each of our lives. God desires for our actions and works of faith to stem from the righteousness He places within us. We are not robots whom God programs and then turns loose to accomplish His prescribed will. Yes, the Holy Spirit empowers us to fulfill the directives of Scripture. However, we have an obligation to demonstrate

what we believe and what the Word teaches. Paul's prayer stands as a reminder that the Christian life is more than mental and spiritual assent; it necessitates physical demonstration.

Third, Paul prays the Thessalonians live in such a way that the name of Jesus is glorified. The Lord Jesus receives glory when His children live in accord with His holiness. Then we are glorified by living in such close association. This is possible only because of God's continued grace.

God's unmerited favor to us needs to be constantly in our mind. The extension of His grace enabled us to be rescued from the spiritual death of sin and raised to new life in Him. His grace continues to be extended to us daily to meet every challenge we face.

—*What does it mean for “Christ [to] be glorified in” us, and for us to be glorified “in him” (v. 12)?*

B. Preserved as Blameless (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

²³ And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

The recurring theme of sanctification and holiness appears again as a prayer for the Thessalonians (see 3:13; 4:1-8). After emphasizing their participation in the sanctification process (abstaining from sin and situations and actions that lead to sin), Paul reminded them of the divine role in the process. *Sanctification* is the process whereby we become holy. *Holiness*, as Paul emphasizes here, is to be complete or whole in the Lord. It is loving Him with such intensity and wholeness that we will allow nothing to hinder that relationship.

Holiness does not drive people away from God, but rather draws them to Him. He initiates and empowers the entire process.

There may be things of which God convicts us individually that are purely for our personal relationship with God and not meant as a spiritual standard of holiness for everyone. We should not try to impose these convictions on others. Neither can we love God completely in spirit and allow

our body to practice sin, as some teach and believe today. In his prayer, Paul eliminates any possibility of that through the reference of “wholly” (completely, entirely, or perfectly) and the inclusion of “spirit and soul and body” (5:23).

Paul also prays the believers be “preserved,” or completely and successfully guarded, without blame until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 23). “Blameless” indicates two things: (1) Good lives are insufficient, as we must live to the highest of standards; and (2) we cannot live that way in our own ability. It requires God’s intervening and sustaining power. Thus, when we stand in the presence of the Lord, we can do so with awe, joy, and peace, not fear. It is a prayer with eternal significance, as all prayers are. It is also a prayer of faith, confident that what is asked will be accomplished (v. 24).

—*What does verse 24 declare about the faithfulness of God?*

TWO APPOINTMENTS

Technology, while lengthening life span, has nevertheless brought into this world death-dealing forces which are potentially beyond our control. It is ironic that the presence of such destructive power should increase the fear of death, since death has always been the inevitable lot of every person, however primitive their culture or at whatever level of sophistication death comes.

Hebrews 9:27 declares, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Whether by a nuclear weapon or by a plague, whether in a car wreck or a tornado, everyone has an appointment with death; and just as surely, everyone has an appointment with final judgment.

Daily Devotions

- M. Caleb Judged Worthy (Numbers 14:6-10, 20-24)
- T. Rewarded for Righteous Living (2 Samuel 22:21-25)
- W. All Will See Christ’s Glory (Isaiah 40:1-5)

- T. The Righteous Judged (Matthew 25:31-40)
- F. The Wicked Judged (Matthew 25:41-46)
- S. The Final Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)