

“God’s Justice Is Revealed”

(2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 – Last Judgment – November 9, 2025)

2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 – ³*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, ⁴so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, ⁵which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; ⁶since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, ⁷and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.*

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ our Savior:

Sometimes Christians going through trials wonder why God lets bad things happen to them, and if it means He has forgotten or is punishing them. This may be a tempting thought if we face persecution and affliction: “Why is God letting this happen to me, when I was trying to do the right thing? Why does God let the wicked have their way while His children suffer?” In other words, we are tempted to question God’s justice.

In Psalm 73, the psalmist wrestles with this question. He sees how the wicked seem to prosper and be free of troubles that others face. So they arrogantly boast and carry out their evil plans, thinking God does not see. At the same time the psalmist sees how, despite his effort to live by faith a holy life, he is afflicted with many troubles. He is tempted to think his faith is in vain. But then he goes into God’s sanctuary, and through God’s revealed Word he understands God’s justice. He sees that finally, God destroys the wicked in the terrors of judgment. Whereas God continues to guide and protect believers and bring them eternal blessings. So with renewed faith, the psalmist prays: “*Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory*” (Psalm 73:23-24).

These truths are proclaimed also in our text. We cannot always understand why God lets Christians undergo trials, persecution, and affliction, especially at the hands of the wicked. Yet as we see in Scripture, **“God’s Justice Is Revealed.”** **1) In this world, it can only be seen by faith,** but **2) In the last judgment, it will be seen by all.**

1) In this world, it can only be seen by faith

In this Epistle, the apostle Paul and his coworkers, Silas and Timothy, address the Christians at Thessalonica. They thank God for the firm faith He has given them amidst severe persecution and affliction. They point out that their faith and spiritual growth is evidence of God's justice, that He is working out His plan in their lives despite the wicked – a truth that is revealed only in God's Word and can only be seen by faith.

Let us trace the history of this young congregation. During Paul's second missionary journey, he and his coworkers in the Gospel came to Thessalonica. He went to the Jewish synagogue and showed from Scripture why Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, saying: *"This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ"* (Acts 17:3). By the Gospel's power, some Jews were brought to faith, along with many Greeks. But other Jews became jealous and gathered wicked men to form a mob, setting the city in an uproar against these missionaries, so that Paul and his coworkers had to move on.

Later, in Paul's first Epistle to the Thessalonians, he reminded them how they had received the Gospel in much affliction, in the joy of the Holy Spirit. They had stopped worshiping idols to serve the living God, trusting Jesus as their Savior. Paul recalled his concern that their faith would stand firm in persecution. He had sent Timothy to strengthen them and bring news about their faith (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 3:1-10).

Timothy's report was encouraging, as Paul repeats here in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians: *"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other"* (vs. 3). The fact that they were persecuted for the sake of Christ and His Gospel did not shake their faith; but by that Gospel, the Holy Spirit only made their faith grow. Nor did the injustice of others and hardships they faced as a congregation make them bitter in relationships or cause infighting among them; but the Spirit only caused their love to abound. These new believers set such a good example that Paul says: *"We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure"* (vs. 4).

If other believers were to hear a report about our faith and love in this congregation, how might they be encouraged? We are not enduring persecution in the same form as the Thessalonians, with angry mobs coming after us trying to destroy our faith. But just the same, Satan hates to see Christ active among us in His pure Word and Sacraments. He hates to see God's Spirit working through the Gospel to increase our faith and love. Each congregation will, to some extent, face temptations and hardships as we stand firm in God's truth in a world of falsehood. Each believer will, to some extent, face persecution for the sake of Christ and His truth. Who knows the ways Satan tries to shake our faith as he did with Job through loss, sickness, suffering, and affliction.

How we respond to our trials can either be an encouragement or discouragement to others in the faith. Do we not have to admit that, at times, we have responded wrongly? We have let the threat of the world's rejection make us hide our faith rather than share it with joy. We have let life's disappointments make us grow cold in faith and zeal. We have let sins of others make us grow bitter in relationships. In our trials, we have not always drawn closer to God's Word and let His Spirit make us grow in faith and love.

We can confess our sins because we know God forgives us for Jesus' sake. When we are tempted to question His justice in our trials, His Word reveals His extreme justice in saving us from our sin and eternal death. The real question of justice is this: Why did God deliver His innocent Son into the hands of the wicked to be unjustly condemned, mistreated, and crucified? Why did God choose to satisfy His perfect justice against our sins by punishing His beloved Son instead of us? Through Jesus' cross and suffering for us, God forgives us and sets us free from the condemnation we deserve. Instead, He counts us innocent as He covers us in Jesus' righteousness!

Now that we belong to Christ by faith, Scripture reveals that we will share His cross. 1 Peter 4:12-14 says: *"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."*

When we must stand firm against the temptations of Satan and falsehood of the world, it is a sign that we are in the right way with Christ. As Paul tells the Thessalonians, this *"is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer"* (vs. 5). Only Christ's cross and suffering delivers us from our sin, and only His righteousness makes us worthy of heaven. But the fact that faith and love grow despite persecution and affliction is evidence of God's justice – that in the face of evil He is working all things for our good, blessing us spiritually and eternally. We share Christ's cross knowing that, by His gift of grace, we will also share His glory (Romans 8:17). As Jesus prayed on the cross for His enemies, we can pray that our enemies may repent and be saved. All this is evidence of our true blessedness, despite the world's injustice.

2) In the last judgment, it will be seen by all

In this world, God's justice can only be seen by faith; but in the Last Judgment, it will be seen by all. As Paul continues: *"since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (vs. 6-8).

When Jesus comes on the clouds in His power and glory to judge the living and the dead what a difference will be seen between unbelievers and believers! For unbelievers, it will be a day of condemnation, terror, and agony; but for believers it will be a day of vindication, joy, and relief (Matthew 24:30-31; Luke 21:27-28; John 5:27-29).

God was reconciling the whole world to Himself in Christ, forgiving all people's sins at the cross (2 Corinthians 5:19). But sinners are saved only through faith in Christ. *"Those who do not know God"* stand guilty in their spiritual darkness. All people know something about God by nature and conscience; yet in impenitence and unbelief sinners suppress even what may be known, so as to continue in sin (Romans 1:18-32). *"Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* may hear it, but do not care about salvation from sin, or trust their own righteousness rather than Christ's to save them.

Unbelievers go to hell, not because their sins were left unpaid for by Christ, but because their unbelief does not receive His gift of salvation. Since they stand before God still in their sin: *"These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"* (vs. 9). The damned are shut out of the joys of heaven with God, to weep and gnash their teeth in the outer darkness (Matthew 22:13). Hell is not temporary; it is never-ending death in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, and all who belong to him (Matthew 25:41).

How differently God's justice will be revealed in believers, as Paul says: *"When He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed"* (vs. 10). By God's grace, we have been given faith through the Gospel. God's Spirit has led us to trust only Christ's sacrificial death to remove our sin. Through faith in Jesus, we already stand justified by God – perfectly forgiven in Christ, clothed in His heavenly robe of righteousness.

So when Jesus appears on the clouds in power and glory, it will be to take us home to heaven, to give us rest from every affliction and evil of this world. Whatever pain, sickness, or loss we experience now, whatever injustice we endure for Jesus' sake, will be replaced with the incomparable glory of His heavenly Kingdom (Romans 8:18).

Have you ever said on some great occasion: "This seems too good to be true"? It will be far greater in heaven. We will live happily ever after in the joys we will share with all the family of God in Christ. There in the presence of our God and Savior, His great glory will inspire never-ending awe and joy-filled worship (Revelation 7:9-12). Already by faith, we join our voices with saints and angels, saying:

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forevermore. Amen.